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The James Boys in Minnesota,

— A N D —

The James Boys and Timberlake.

By D. W. STEVENS,

Author of "Mysterious Ike; or, The Masked Unknown," "The Ford Boys' Vengeance," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK AND JESSE.

STANDING near the road a few miles from Kearney, in Clay County, Missouri, back in a wooded pasture, is an old but strong, neat log house. It has three rooms in it, and all bear the appearance of thrift, and cleanliness. There are a few lilac bushes in the front yard, and it is just such an old-fashioned Western country home as any one would be delighted to spend a few days at during the early spring or autumn.

It was a bright sunny day in August, in the year of 1876, that we call the attention of the reader to this house. It is no ordinary house, ordinary and unpretending as it may look. This house has possessed its history. Blood has been shed in and around it. Its walls are marked with bullets, and the fences about it show the same marks.

This log cabin is the home of the noted Missouri outlaws—Frank and Jesse James. It is the residence of Dr. Reuben Samuels, their step-father. Their mother, a lady wonderfully vivacious with her one arm, and the weight of fifty-four years, is standing in the door.

Her arm was blown off by the explosion of a hand grenade, thrown into her house by Pinkerton's detectives a few years before. A young son of hers was killed by the same explosion. Jesse and Frank, who were in the house at the time, and the cause of the attack, after severely punishing the detectives, made their escape.

It is a peaceful scene that meets the old lady's view as she stands in the door of her house, shading her eyes with her remaining hand. The farm-houses are thickly strewn along the road, all the way from Kearney to the James homestead. The fields of ripened wheat is cut down and gathered into stacks; the sound of the sickle and the distant whirr of the threshing machine makes music that alone can be heard in harvest.

"All is right, boys; no one in sight," says Mrs. Samuels, the tall old lady and mother of the outlaws.

The persons addressed were none other than her two notorious sons, Frank and Jesse. That they should be home was nothing strange. Deeds of daring and coolness were almost of hourly occurrence.

Jesse and Frank did not know fear, and yet exercised in the midst of their most daring acts a care and prudence which was wonderful.

"I think, mother," said Jesse, who sat coolly at a table with his solemn, grave-looking brother on the opposite side,

"that it is useless for you to stand there looking out for any one. The facts are, people have lost a relish for the capture of the James Boys."

As Jesse spoke, he laughed so heartily and merrily that the house rang with the echo.

"It seems that they would begin to by this time," replied the mother, entering the house and closing the door. There was a look of pride upon her face, as she turned her eyes upon her tall sons, who were seated as graceful as kings of society at the table.

"Well, Frank, what do you think of it?" said Jesse to his brother, who was scanning a map of Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Nebraska, which was lying between them on the table.

"I hardly know," replied the solemn Frank.

"Have you no expression whatever?"

"None, except it is very hazardous."

"All of our expeditions are that," replied Jesse, with a laugh.

"I know they are, but this is extremely so," replied the solemn Frank, his fingers tracing an imaginary route from Missouri to Minnesota.

"I do not regard it as much more hazardous than many other undertakings in which we have been engaged," Jesse replied.

"The way is long."

"Have we not worked from ocean to ocean?"

"But we have no friends in Minnesota."

"Friends! What friends had we in California, Arkansas, and many other places we have been?"

"But, Jess, it will be a long retreat, even if we should prove successful."

"I know it."

"What assurance have we that the trip will pay?"

"Bill Chadwell, our new man, is from Minnesota. He got into a little affair up there, I believe, in regard to some horses. It seems that Bill was borrowing horses without the consent of their owners, and he was not punctual in returning them. He and some of the officers seemed to hold different opinions on the matter, and Bill took it into his head to come to Missouri. He readily fell in with some of our boys and became one of us. Now Bill says that the bank at Mankato is the best thing that we can strike on the continent."

"How many of the other boys have you seen in regard to it?" asked Frank.

"I have talked with Cale Younger, his brothers Bob and Jim, Clell Miller, and Charley Pitts."

"What do they think of it?"

"They are all in favor of it."

"With their experience, especially the experience of Cale Younger, their experience is worth something."

"The facts are, Frank, that we have made things so hot about here that we hardly dare stir. The infernal detectives are on our trail constantly, and we don't dare touch a bank or train. I think a little pleasure trip north to Minnesota will do us all some good."

Frank was silent. As his custom always was to yield to his brother's wishes and desires, he made but feeble remonstrance.

The brothers then carefully perused some lines on the map before them. The creeks, rivers and railroads were carefully noted. Much of the way was already familiar to them, having learned it on their expeditions into Iowa.

Generals laying their plans for a campaign could not have been more careful than they were.

"When are we to meet the others?" Frank at last asked, pushing the map aside, and turning from the table with the air of a man who had just settled a most difficult point.

"To-night," Jesse replied.

"Where?"

"The big oak in the bottom."

"What hour?"

"Nine."

Again silence fell on the group. The mother had sat anxiously looking in the face of her sons with a kind of ferocious pride. Her face expressed a nervous anxiety, as it did when they were in her presence.

Arising, she once more went to the door. No sooner had she turned her eyes down the road than she sprang back with a cry of alarm.

"What is it, mother?" asked Jesse, quickly, yet coolly.

"Officers are coming."

"How many?"

"Half a dozen, at least."

The James Boys each seized his faithful revolver, and going to the small windows in the south side took a peep down the road.

They saw a small body of horsemen slowly and carefully advancing up the hill.

Frank cocked his pistol and stood at the window aiming at the horsemen.

"Don't fire, Frank," said Jesse.

"We had better commence now," Frank replied. "We can clean them out before they get near the house."

"But it may be they are not officers."

"Yes, they are," Frank answered; "I recognize the sheriff as with them."

"But don't shoot, they may have no intentions against us."

Being thus adjured Frank lowered his pistol, but stood gazing through the window with all the ferocity of a hungry tiger.

"Go up to the garret," the mother said, "if they should even stop they will not know you are here, and you can easily escape by the back way if they search the house."

"Mother is right," said Jesse, "we want to bring on no fight here now. If they pass by, and do not discover us, all will be right. If we should be found, we can get away with any six men on earth."

Frank saw the wisdom of his brother's remark, and, as was usual with him, nodded assent to what he had said.

The brothers then ascended the narrow stair-way to the garret, and there awaited carefully to see what the officers and his posse would do.

There were narrow windows from the garret looking out upon the road.

The James Boys went to these, and holding their pistols cocked in their hands, watched the officers as they rode leisurely along up the hill. They were chatting and laugh-

ing merrily, and little dreamed that two dark muzzles were pointing from those small windows.

"This is Dr. Samuels' house, the house of the James Boys," they heard one say to the other.

It was evident that the expedition was not against them, for after giving the house a careless glance, the sheriff and his posse rode on and soon disappeared over the hill.

CHAPTER II.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS EIGHT.

"We were mistaken, Frank," said Jesse James as they saw the horsemen disappear. "It was not us they were after."

"No," replied Frank, in his ever solemn manner.

"Where are they going, and who are they after? is a question we might seriously consider," added Jesse.

"May it not be some of the other boys?" said Frank.

"More likely it is to drop in on our meeting to-night," said Jesse as he eyed the road along which the horsemen had gone.

"They would be in poor business to do that," said Frank.

"One would think so," replied Jesse. "What could six men do with eight such men as will meet under the old oak to-night?"

"Nothing."

"It is some other business, of which we have no knowledge. They do not suspect that we are near the house, for if they did, they would not have ridden by so coolly."

At this moment the mother appeared at the foot of the stairway to notify the outlaws that the coast was clear again if they wished to descend.

Both came down-stairs, and went out into the stable where their horses were. They carefully placed the saddles on the backs of their animals, and examined the condition of their pistols.

Something more than ordinary was going on, as could be easily discovered by any one acquainted with the manner and character of the James Boys.

The remainder of the day was spent in carefully examining saddles, bridles, halters, horses and arms, to see that not the least defect was anywhere perceivable.

When evening came, their mother came to the stable to inform them the coast was clear, and supper was ready.

They left the stable, and went to the house where supper was ready. They partook of it, and going to the stable, mounted their blooded animals, and going out of the great gate, down through the wooded pasture and out into the road.

They galloped along it for two or three miles, up hill and down, passing farm cottages, and large fields, corn, wheat and hemp. It was a still, clear night in August, the moon arose in the East, the stars shone bright in the heavens, and beauty and splendor seemed to dwell all about the grand old forest.

Farmers and harvesters were retiring for the night, having completed the work of the day.

Everything indicated peace and quietude, and yet along the roads, from different directions, could be seen fierce, lawless men gathering to concoct plans of robbery, and, perhaps, murder.

Days of perfect peace and security were not known to Missouri in those days, and will never be as long as outlaws of the James character have friends high in social and political circles.

Jesse and Frank were excellent horsemen. Both were mounted on thoroughbred animals, and each bestrode his roadster as though he was a part of the animal. Almost sixteen years constantly in the saddle had made them master horsemen.

They left the main road, galloped off to the right, down

a narrow little bottom between two high ridges. Each was clothed with a thick forest of timber.

The bottom contained a few spears of long bottom grass, the principal part of it, however, had been eaten off by the cattle which ran loose upon the range.

The trees were small black oak and pin oak, growing along the edges of the small prairie bottom, in the center of which was a shallow ravine, or draw.

The underbrush was hazel and stunted crab-apple trees, the latter bushes so thorny that it was impossible for one to ride through them.

Going down this ravine or valley land at a gallop for about two miles, they diverged into another, leading off to the west, which they followed for some distance.

Then entering a draw which ran northwest from a field, they crossed this and entered a thicket, ascending a hill upon the other side.

They passed through it and came into an old road well grown up with weeds, and known in that portion of the country as a blind road.

There was little fear of being discovered, for blind roads are seldom traveled. This blind road led almost due west. They followed it for about one-fourth of a mile, and then crossing a ditch, ascended a hill. There was a one-and-a-half story farm house built of logs and weather-boarded on the outside, about one-eighth of a mile, on the slight rise of ground south of them. A lane led up to the house, with a fine young orchard, now hanging with fruit, west of them.

Leaving house, orchard, road and lane behind them, they entered a thick forest of young hickory and oak timber. It was so well shaded here that the moon beams could scarcely penetrate the thick foliage. They traveled about one-fourth of a mile through the forest in a north-western direction when they descended a hill not high but steep, and came upon one of those small prairie bottoms.

It was not more than three-fourths of an acre in size, and completely surrounded by thickets of hazel, crab-apple and wild plum so dense that one could scarcely ride through it.

In the center of this little piece of bottom was an oak tree, not very large but with branches extending out in every direction. The James boys rode toward it.

As they did so they observed several dark forms start up near the tree, and heard the snort of a horse.

"Halt!" said a voice.

"Well, Charlie, are we not all right?" said Jesse.

"Yes, all right, boys," said Charley Pitts. "It is Frank and Jesse James."

The two rode up to where six more stood or squatted under the branches of the old oak tree.

"You are late," said a voice which Jesse recognized as his old time-honored companion, Cale Younger.

"Rather, we will admit, but the facts are we saw the sheriff to-day riding around the country, and we were induced to use some precaution."

"Was he alone?"

"No; he had a posse of five men with him."

"You certainly do not fear any six men living, Jesse James?"

"No, I do not," Jesse replied; "yet it would be best to move out of this county quietly if we want to make a success of this thing."

"Jesse is quite right," said Cale Younger.

"Now are we all here?" asked Jesse.

"I guess so," Cale replied. "Here is Frank and Jesse, that is two; Clell Miller, Charley Pitts, and Chadwell is five, and the three Youngers make up the illustrious eight."

"Well, have you talked over any plans?" asked Jesse.

"Yes, a great many," Cale said; "though we want to hear what plans you have."

"You have been in Minnesota for some time, have you not?"

"Yes; but I was in Northfield. We are thinking of making a raid on Mankato. I would be at home in Northfield," said Cole.

"Cale has a sweetheart up there."

"Ah, Cale, you naughty boy, to be playing with the affections of a young lady in that way. But Bill Chadwell knows the whole county, and he perhaps would be the most suitable person to lead an expedition," said Jesse; "or at least he is best capable of advising."

"He can advise of course," said Clell Miller; "but it is no use in talking about any one leading the expedition except our old captain, the Bandit King of America. The boys will obey no other leader than Jesse W. James."

"That is the ticket of all!" cried Bill Chadwell, enthusiastically. "I can advise, but I would not think of commanding the company."

"Well, then," said Jesse, "I will cut all this short by saying that I have considered everything carefully, and concluded that Northfield is a better point for us to attack than Mankato. When we get into the last mentioned place we will be surrounded by railroads and telegraph wires, which are worse than a battery of artillery."

"There is something in what Jesse says," said Cale. "I have thought some of that myself."

"We must travel to Minnesota in pairs; going in different directions. Not more than three or four must go together, at most. We must have a meeting there—let me see."

He paused for a moment to consider, after making a careful calculation.

"Well, we will make it on the night of the eighth day of September. That will give us all plenty of time to get there. Let the meeting be on the road leading south of Northfield, five miles from town, at the bridge where the road crosses the creek."

"That is just it," said Bill Chadwell. "Jesse has certainly been there before. He knows the country thoroughly."

"When will we start?" asked Charley Pitts.

"Now," said Jesse. "Prepare to mount."

The horses were all drawn up in line, and each thrust his foot in the stirrup.

"Mount!" and the outlaws vaulted in the saddles.

CHAPTER III.

THE JOURNEY TO MINNESOTA.

WITH line well dressed, the mounted outlaws awaited the order of their chief. A more formidable sight, perhaps, could not have been found.

"Attention, squad!" cried Jesse, as clearly and with as much emphasis as if it was old guerrilla days again.

"Break ranks, march!"

Then came the wheeling and galloping in every direction. In a moment all had disappeared into the thickets, to meet again nearly five hundred miles away, save the James Boys, Jesse and Frank.

The success of the Missouri outlaws has depended on their thorough organization and discipline.

When they are to meet at a certain spot, at a certain hour, they are there. They may disband, to meet at another place a thousand miles away. They are there to the hour and the minute. How can the detectives effect anything with a force which works equally as secretly as they themselves; blood-thirsty, ferocious, brave and determined, with everything at stake?

Frank and Jesse James remained until the others had entirely disappeared. Their well-trained animals were perfectly motionless.

They could hear the crashing of underbrush and tramp of horses' feet in every direction for some minutes. These sounds grew fainter and fainter, until they at last died away altogether.

"Frank."

"Well, Jess," said the solemn Frank.

"Are you ready to commence the journey?"

"Yes."

"Then come on."

Touching his horse's flank with his spur, the animal started forward and Frank's followed.

They tore and crashed their way through the thicket, and at last ascending to the hill, turned eastward until they came to the road leading northward.

Here they put their horses to a swift gallop, and went rattling along at a rate of speed which became ex-guerrillas and highway robbers.

The way was rough. Over hills, down glades, across swamps, and occasionally leaping a fence, they galloped on until they entered the main road that led to Kearney.

The night was clear and the early part of it sultry. The James Boys reined in their horses before they became too warm, and proceeded leisurely.

"I hope," said Frank, "that we shall find the weather cooler as we advance northward."

"We certainly shall. The weather has been excessively warm," Jesse replied, "we cannot make much speed in progressing this way."

They passed through Kearney. The little town was buried in slumber, and no one dreamed that the noted James Boys were passing through it.

Beyond they started their horses at a good canter. Suddenly they heard the clatter of hoofs coming toward them.

"Frank," said Jesse, "I have a notion to do a little work to-night."

"How?" asked the solemn brother.

"There is some one coming down the road."

"Yes, I know it."

"Well, you just stand aside, and I will relieve him of his surplus cash, jewels and such trifles."

Frank reined in his horse at one side of the road, and remained under the dark shadows of some trees.

Jesse rode on leisurely until he came up to the horseman, and then reaching out his hand he seized the rein.

"Halt!" he said, in sharp, clear tones.

"Who are you?" demanded the horseman, in sharp, angry tones.

"King of the road; stand and deliver," cried Jesse.

"What do you mean? You better let go my horse!" yelled the stranger.

"Stand and deliver up your money, or I'll blow your brains out."

"Who are you?"

"A highwayman."

"Take that!"

"Bang!" went a pistol.

The tremendous flash and thunder-clap was almost in the face of Jesse, who seemed stupefied, and sat like a rock upon his horse.

There was a yell of rage and anguish from Frank James, who, plunging his spurs into his horse's flanks, came dashing up to where his brother sat, expecting to see him fall each moment.

"Ha, ha, ha! That settles Mr. Highwayman," chuckled the stranger.

He did not hear the thunder of hoofs until Frank James was upon him.

"Crack, crack, crack!" rang out three pistol shots before the strange horseman had time to raise his weapon, or even cock it.

With a groan the horseman fell, and his horse, frightened beyond control, went tearing away down the road.

"Oh, Jess, Jess, Jess!" cried Frank, as he rode up to where Jesse still sat upon his horse like a statue, "are you hurt?"

For a moment he waited for an answer, and Jesse was still silent.

"Are you hurt, Jesse? Speak, oh, just speak one word. Are you hurt?"

"No."

The answer seemed to remove a load a size smaller than a mountain from Frank's breast.

"Did the villain touch you?"

"No, I think not; but the muzzle of his pistol was so close to my ear that I fear I shall be deaf for weeks to come yet."

"That is much better than having a bullet through your head."

"Yes, some. Where is the fool who tried to shoot me?"

"There he lays at the road-side with no less than three bullets in him. I have sent him to his long home."

Jesse shook his head.

"What, did I not do right? He made a deliberate attempt on your life," said Frank.

"You mistake me, Frank," said Jesse. "I do not shake my head in disapprobation of what you have done at all. I feel a little unsettled yet about the head. By thunder, the scoundrel's bullet has tipped my ear a little. The top of it is bloody."

"The shot was certainly very close," said Frank, who became more grave as his brother regained his vivacity.

"It was, but you know the old adage, that a miss is as good as a mile. It applies very well in my case. I am sure that I will feel just as well in a year from now as if I had not had this bit of an adventure. But let us see how our friend Reckless is. Aha, there he lies on his face in the dust. You must have hit hard, Frank."

"He is dead," was Frank's reply.

Jesse dismounted from his horse and turned the body over, there was a shot in the right breast, one in the neck, and a third entered just above the right eye. The man was quite dead.

"You need not have wasted so much lead," Jesse replied.

"Either one of these would have killed any man."

"But I wanted to make sure of him, Frank replied.

"I will now make sure of what he has. Hello, Frank, I know this fellow. He is a constable. That answers for his being so handy with this bull-dog pistol."

Jesse took from his pocket thirteen dollars and a silver watch. Then mounting his horse, they galloped on.

The night had grown considerably cooler, and when morning came they were fully twenty miles from the spot at which Frank had shot the constable.

"Shall we stop for breakfast?" asked Frank.

"No, we must push on until noon. News flies now with lightning-like rapidity. Should we stop for breakfast, the people would wonder why we did not get our breakfast where we stayed all night. If they find that we traveled all night, they will begin to suspicion that all is not right, and we should have an officer on our track."

They rode on, the forenoon was excessively hot. They paused at a creek to water their horses and wash away the dirt which accumulated upon their brows.

Then mounting again, they rode at a slow canter along the great, dusty road.

"I think we may safely put up to-night," said Jesse. "we will be out of our old range, and we can find some good old farmer, who will be willing to entertain us for the night."

At noon they halted at a farm-house, and asked for a dinner and to have their horses fed.

"You must have traveled pretty hard, gentlemen," said the farmer, as he saw the condition of their horses.

"We have traveled very leisurely, sir," said Jesse, "but the day is so excessively hot that our horses as well as ourselves—"

"Where are you going?"

"We are going up into Iowa to purchase cattle," said Jesse.

The horses were put in the stable, watered, fed and rubbed down. The highwaymen went into the house, and Jesse sat playing with a little child until dinner was announced. After dinner they paid the farmer, though he declared he did not wish to charge them, and then mounting their horses they once more resumed their journey to Minnesota.

CHAPTER IV.

A HOUSE OF DEATH.

THE James Boys had been two days on their journey northward, and were well up in the central western part of Iowa. The first night they had traveled all night, the second they slept at a farm-house, and, being quite refreshed, the next morning mounted their blooded steeds and started on the road once more at a good round rate of speed.

The second day they made good speed, as their horses were fresh, and they themselves quite cheerful.

At the close of the second day they had entered a portion of the country which was wild and broken. There were towering hills and immense forests.

At last they came upon a house that was situated on a dark, lonesome-looking road. It was a tall, gloomy-looking affair, old-fashioned, and built of stone, and had a wild, weird look about it.

There was no other habitation within miles of it, and the dark, deep recesses of the forest in which it was situated, made it appear doubly gloomy.

But it was growing late in the evening when it was reached, and they had either to put up at this house or run the risk of passing the night in the dark forests beyond.

"This place looks as if it might be haunted," said the solemn Frank, as he turned his eyes toward the gloomy looking old house.

"You are not over your Arkansaw ghost scare yet, Frank," laughed Jesse. Frank averted his head to keep from meeting his brother's eyes.

"Confound that Arkansaw ghost, Jess, will you never get over it?"

"Well, we must stay here if we can and make the most of it," said Jesse. "If we miss this place we will have to spend the night in these dark, gloomy woods, which would be worse than in the house."

"The large house was surrounded by a stone wall with a large gate in front of it. Riding up to the gate Jesse said to his brother:

"I will now try and see if I can arouse the inmates."

The sun was down, it was almost dark and not a sign of human life could be seen about the old house.

"Helloa!" he called.

"Bow, wow, wow, wow!" came the loud bark of a large dog, which arose from his sleeping position in one corner of the fence, and came bounding toward the gate.

"Helloa!"

"Bow, wow, wow!"

"Confound you, shut up," yelled Jesse to the dog.

"Some one else wants to speak besides you."

At this moment the door opened, and a man with red, shock hair came out.

"Git out, Bull," he cried, seizing a large stick and giving the noisy dog a lick with it which sent him yelping across the yard.

"What do ye want?" the man asked.

"Who lives here?" asked Jesse.

"I do."

"Well, what is your name?"

"Juniper Nasheus."

"Well, Mr. Nasheus, can we get to stay all night here at your house? we are very much worn out, and this is the only house we can find."

"Well, strangers, reckon ye mought," said the wicked-looking man, with a wicked-looking grin.

"Can you accommodate our horses with oats and corn?"

"I guess I kin. We keep lots o' folks here. They find no other place to go. Jist git right down and come in, an' the ole woman an' we uns 'll do the best we kin fur ye."

Not a little surprised and pleased at the frank manner of the landlord, they dismounted from their weary horses.

"Come here, Kelly," cried the landlord, and a young fellow about nineteen years of age, tall, raw-boned, with an awkward step and rather muscular arms came out of the house.

His head was red, his face was red, covered with freckles, his eyelashes were red, hands red, and in fact he was all red.

"What d'ye want?" Red-headed Kelly, as they afterwards learned his name to be, asked.

"Take these yerc hosses to the barn an' feed 'em well. Jest come in, gentlemen."

Now all who know the history of the James Boys, know that it was an invariable rule of theirs never to allow any one to take charge of their horses without they themselves inspecting them after they were stabled and fed.

Jesse went into the house with the garrulous landlord, while Frank followed the red-headed youth to the stable.

"You do not have many customers in this out-of-the-way place!" said Jesse to the landlord, when they were seated in the front-room.

"Yes, we have a right smart sometimes. Ye see nearly every one who goes along this road has to stop here either fur somethin' to eat or to stay all night."

The landlord lit a small black pipe, and taking a seat in one corner of the fire-place, puffed away for some time in silence.

Jesse looked at him and saw his cold gray eye watching him through the clouds of smoke which rolled about his head. When at last footsteps were heard in the hall, Jesse felt relieved. There was something so cruel in that cold gray eye that he had really grown nervous.

Frank, accompanied by the red-headed boy, entered.

"Wall, sir, did ye find plenty fur yer hosses to cat? I allers hez people an' their hosses well fed," said the landlord.

"They will do quite well," said Frank, gravely.

"Now, Kelly, go an' tell yer mother to git supper ready fur these two men," said the landlord, still continuing to smoke his short black pipe.

Kelly arose and left the room. The landlord entered into a cold, heartless conversation with his guests.

When supper was announced, they arose and went into a large old-fashioned country dining-room. Here they met the wife of the landlord. She was large, with a broad, flat face, with hair and eyes red. She was certainly nearly related to the red-headed boy who had taken charge of their horses.

Frank and Jesse ate sparingly, and though urged to drink coffee, managed to spill most of it without drinking more than a tablespoonful each.

After supper they, being weary, expressed a desire to retire. The red-headed boy showed them up-stairs to a bedroom in which were two beds.

The room was at the head of the stairway, and the moon shone in at one of the windows.

"I say, Frank," said Jesse, "I do not like these people. I saw the old rascal cyeing our heavy gold watch chains."

"I believe that infernal coffee was drugged," Frank replied.

"I know it was," said Jesse, "I am just going to look about in the room, and see if there are any infernal machines or pitfalls about it."

He began searching under and around the bed. At last he came to a closet door, he opened this and started back with an exclamation of horror.

"What is it?" asked Frank, coming forward.

Jesse pointed to the body of a man sitting bolt upright in the closet, his throat cut, the face ghastly white, and all covered with blood.

They were truly in a house of death.

CHAPTER V.

THE FATE OF THE MURDERERS.

ACCUSTOMED to scenes of bloodshed and horror as they were the James Boys were shocked at the discovery.

"Frank," said Jesse, "we have had a very narrow escape."

"Yes," the grave, solemn Frank replied.

"Ugh!" said Jesse, closing the door of the closet, and arising to his feet. "That is a sight calculated to give one the nightmare. I hope we may never see the like of it again."

"Yes, I hope not, too," Frank said.

"What an ugly sight," continued Jesse, shaking his head, as he arose to his feet, and carried the candle across the room to a small stand, on which he placed it. "That coffee they gave us, Frank, was drugged. It was their intention to put us to sleep and then murder us."

"Very likely," replied the solemn Frank, with apparently but little concern. His face was grave, as it always was, while Jesse's had almost instantaneously regained its reckless, careless, light-hearted look.

The cold, steel-like glitter which had been indelibly stamped in their eyes, on that summer day in 1861, when Jesse's back smarted under blows, and he swore to wipe out the indignity with blood, seemed to become colder and harder, as they reflected on what the night might bring forth.

"Jesse, we are in a nest of robbers," said Frank.

"Yes, and murderers," replied Jesse. "We must teach them a lesson."

"I think so."

"We must wipe the entire bloodthirsty set from the face of existence!"

"It's a duty we owe society," said Jesse, with a light laugh. "We are working now wholly for the benefit of society."

"Yes," replied Frank, without the least bit of humor in his voice.

"It may be that by ridding the world of such wretches, Frank, that we may kind a balance accounts for some of our own missteps."

"I think so."

"Now, let us see. What plan shall we fall upon? Oh, fie, I have it. I will get in this bed, you in that. Then we will be on each side of the wretches when they come in. They will enter that door, will carry a candle, which will doubtless be blown out as soon as we are discovered to be awake; but I will prepare for such a contingency."

He took from his coat-pocket a small but powerful dark-lantern, which he lit and placed under the covers of the bed.

"When they come in," Jesse continued, "and get near enough for us to make sure work, we will flash this lantern out over the scene, and then rise up in our beds, give 'em time to say their prayers, and shoot them down."

"That is right," answered Frank, with a nod of the head as if the plan was a preconceived one, and Jesse was merely rehearsing a part he was to perform.

"Now we will undress and to bed as quietly and unconcernedly as possible," said Jesse.

The James Brothers removed their clothing and went to bed as quietly and unconcernedly as if nothing had happened, or was about to happen.

"Frank!" whispered Jesse.

"Well," whispered Frank.

"Do you feel drowsy?"

"Not in the least."

"I hear them stirring down below."

"So do I."

"Do not make the least noise. Lay perfectly still until they have passed so far they cannot get to the stair way and I'll flash the light on them."

"I understand."

The brothers both became silent again. The minutes glided slowly by, and an hour passed. All was quiet below. Jesse felt a little nervous, that the attack was not made. The expectancy of an attack is far more trying on the nerves than the attack itself.

Another hour dragged slowly by. At last the movement of feet could be heard below. There was a creaking on the stairway, and footsteps could be heard ascending.

"Hold the light up, Kelly, blast ye!" said a voice which

they recognized as the landlord's; "d'ye want us to stumble over each other?"

"Oh, bother!" said Kelly, in a whisper.

"Why, bother?" whispered the landlord. "We'll soon have this little job over, and we kin have money enough to buy all the liquor we want to drink for a year to come."

"Yes, but I don't believe they are asleep."

"Why?"

"I don't believe they drank the coffee we gave them."

"Why, my boy, your mother says that the cups were almost drained, and they got enough to make them sleep sound as logs."

"But the old woman's eyes must be bad. What if they should be awake?"

"Why, we can very easy finish them with our knives."

"They may be armed with pistols."

"Tut, tut! nothing of the kind."

"If you had let me take the double-barreled shot-gun I could a killed 'em both at supper," said the red-headed young scoundrel.

The James Boys now shuddered to think how near they were to destruction that evening.

"But the old gun makes such a noise, and scatters so," said the landlord. "It is so much nicer and smoother to do the work with the knife. You shall have the hosses, Kelly; yer mother an' me will be content with the money and jewels they have about 'em. Come on."

Having overcome the grumbling of the wrathful youth by promises of reward, the pair of villains began to ascend the stairway once more.

"Hist!" said the landlord. "Can ye hear 'em snore?"

Both Frank and Jesse were snoring in a most artistic manner.

"Yes," replied Kelly.

"Then all is right, come on."

They carefully pushed open the door and entered the room. Jesse lay on his back, both arms under the quilt. One hand held his revolver, and the other the dark lantern.

Kelly carried a candle, and each of the villains had a murderous looking knife in his hand.

They walked directly forward until opposite the bed on which Jesse lay.

"Now hold it steady," said the landlord, grasping his knife firmly, "an' I'll make so sure a stroke that he won't so much as groan, an' then for the next."

"Hold!" cried Jesse, rising up in bed, holding a pistol in one hand, and a lantern in the other. "What do you want here?"

"Oh mercy, indeed, indeed, my good sir, I came to see if you wanted anything."

"What are you doing with those knives?"

"Oh mercy, mercy," howled Kelly, who felt that all was lost.

"Are you ready, Frank?" asked Jesse.

"Yes," replied the solemn highwayman, who sat upright in bed, his pistol leveled at the landlord.

"Stand back a little, gentlemen," said Jesse.

"Why, oh why?" asked the landlord.

"We are going to shoot you and don't want the blood to spatter in our faces."

"Oh, oh, oh, oh!" howled both, rolling over on the floor and falling on their knees to beg for mercy. The candle was extinguished, but Jesse lantern lighted up the room.

"Frank you may take the landlord, and I will settle this Red Headed Kelly."

"Well," was the answer.

"Oh, mercy, mercy, mercy! Don't kill us we must not die; we must not die."

"Yes you must. For the good of law and order you must both die. When I count three, fire, Frank."

"Yes," Frank replied. The men howled and begged.

"One."

"Oh mercy, mercy, mercy!" clapping hands.

"Two."

They rolled over on the floor and then once more kneeled.

"Three!"

"Crack, crack!" went two pistol shots.

"Oh! oh!" and the landlord lay shot through the head, with Red Headed Kelly across him a bullet in his breast.

CHAPTER VI.

EVA'S STRANGE BEAU.

IN the little town of Northfield in Minnesota, situated in the suburbs, was the neat cottage of widow Leigh. Mrs. Leigh had one child, Eva, a beautiful girl of sixteen summers, with large dark eyes and sweet cherry lips. Eva was the pride of her mother and belle of the village.

Many were the offers of marriage she had already received, and for a long time it was supposed that Ronald Corder, the young farmer who was living on a farm joining the town, was the accepted.

But in the spring of 1876 a stranger, with such a delicious urbane air, came to the village. He made himself agreeable everywhere, and especially to Miss Eva Leigh. Young Ronald, with his honest, sunburnt face, was thrown aside for the new beau. The stranger gave his name as Mr. Oscar Bell.

He was evidently a man of vast wealth. He dressed well; wore real diamonds and a heavy gold-sealed watch. He was well versed, for he discoursed fluently on almost any subject.

Mr. Bell was soon a general favorite in the village. No evening party was a success without him. He was soon familiar with all the marriageable young ladies, and on the best terms with their mammas. He talked of buying a large tract of land, and establishing a fine stock farm on a scale that was wonderful.

Wealthy people of the village talked about him a great deal, and he was frequently consulting with the banker on schemes which would involve many thousands of dollars.

With Eva Leigh Mr. Bell was almost constantly. He declared her charming, delicious, and she thought him the most admirable gentleman she had ever met.

Both were mutually agreeable to each other, and conjectures among the villagers were strongly made that Ronald Corder had been superseded by the strange Mr. Bell.

It was evening. The sun was yet an hour above the horizon. Two young girls were in the large lane that led from Northfield. One was the beautiful Eva, with large dark eyes and raven black hair. Her companion was a blonde, with golden hair and eyes of heaven's own blue. She was lovely and attractive, yet so timid and shy, that she would not begin to compare with the belle of Northfield, the bewitching Eva Leigh. Eva was swinging her straw hat carelessly in her hand, while the light breeze toyed with her raven curls.

Her companion, the shy little Laura Norton, stood leaning against the fence. Both were beneath the spreading branches of a large oak tree. The field on the north of the lane belonged to Mr. Ronald Corder, that on the south to his father.

"Oh, Eva, how naughty of you," said Laura Norton.

"Naughty, how naughty?" demanded the spirited Eva.

"To be keeping the company of a man about whom you absolutely know nothing."

"Do you refer to Mr. Bell?"

"Yes."

"Don't I know something of him?"

"But very little, you must admit."

"I know, Laura Norton, that he is a gentleman, and that while I keep his company, many of the girls in the town are actually dying with envy."

"Oh, Eva!"

"It is so, Laura, and you know it, too," said Eva, pouting, like the spoiled beauty she was.

"Eva, you are very unkind and unjust to many of your friends to make such assertions; I only tell you for your own good," said Laura, as though her feelings were hurt.

"People should not be so anxious to attend to other persons' affairs," replied Eva.

Seeing that her companion was anxious for some pretense for a quarrel, Laura determined to change the subject in some way to please her vanity.

"What will become of Ronald Corder?" she asked.

"Oh, I will give him the go-by," replied Eva, with a heartless yet a pretty little laugh.

"Eva, you should not trifle with the heart of as noble a young man as Ronald."

"Well, when he has not sense enough to see I was only flirting with him, it was not my fault. I could not help it."

"But you made every one believe once that you liked Ronald."

"Oh, I once thought I did, but that was before I met Mr. Bell. The facts are there is not dash enough about Ronald to suit me. I must have a fellow with plenty of dash about him."

"I fear you are making a mistake, Eva. Ronald, plain, simple Ronald, with his honest, sun-browned face, may be far more worthy of your love than the dashing Mr. Bell."

"Oh, Laura, Laura, do you suppose I could ever consent to settle down to a prosy farm life? No; I am to be the wife of some city man. I am going to move in the upper tens."

The little laugh which followed this shocked the sensible little Laura, who could only stand and gaze at her friend in wonder.

Laura was silent; after a moment, Eva added:

"I must go home now, Laura. Have no fears on my account. If Mr. Bell should desert me, I can easily whistle up Mr. Ronald Corder. Until that time you can flirt with Ronald; if I want to take him back I can do so. Ta, ta!" and, with another merry laugh, she went tripping away along the road.

As Laura stood gazing at the retreating form of Eva, she said to herself:

"Eva, Eva! how can you treat the noble Ronald Corder so lightly?"

At this moment there was a quick step behind her. She uttered a slight scream and started to fly, when a hand seized her wrist.

"Laura, Laura!" said a deep, manly voice at her side.

She turned and beheld a stout young farmer, dressed in home-spun farmer's dress, with a broad-brimmed straw hat upon his head. He was a tall, manly-looking fellow, with open countenance and bright hazel eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Corder, are you here?"

"I am certainly," he replied, smiling.

"Is it fair, Mr. Corder, to be eavesdropping in that way?"

"I was not eavesdropping intentionally," said Ronald. "I had set down beneath the shade of that tree, on the inside of the fence, when I overheard what you and Eva said, every word."

"Oh, Mr. Corder," and Laura blushed deeply.

"I heard every word, Laura," continued Ronald, "and was never more happy, or felt more flattered in all my life. The world about Northfield has been mistaken if they supposed I loved Eva Leigh. I never did, though I admired her beauty. I love one, the little blue-eyed Laura Norton, she who has, unconscious of my presence, dared sound my praises; I ask you now if my love is returned? Forgive my rudeness, but believe me, it comes from the heart."

We draw a veil over the scene. Laura went home happier than she had ever supposed she could be. She was loved by the man whom she loved most on earth. Never did she dream that she could be so happy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEETING AT NORTHFIELD.

"FRANK," said Jesse.

"Well," answered Frank.

"I guess they are done for."

After a few spasmodic kicks, both the landlord and his worthy son lay quite still. From the rays of the dark lantern, he could see the blood flowing from the center of the landlord's head, while it gushed in a torrent from Red Headed Kelly's breast.

"Suppose you get up and look after them," said Jesse, coolly. "They may need some more help on their journey to that tropical region where brimstone is the prevailing traffic."

Frank sprang from the bed and hastily drew on his clothes. He went to the bodies and after delivering a kick to each, said:

"They are all right."

"Both gone?"

"Yes, dead as herrings."

"Good," said Jesse, springing from the bed and dressing.

"I tell you what, Frank, we did that job quite neatly."

"Yes."

"The country is well rid of such wretches, and as we are public benefactors, we should see that no such red-handed violators of civil and moral laws live."

"I think not," Frank replied.

"It is our duty to the public to shoot such men."

"Of course."

At this moment they heard footsteps rapidly ascending the stairway.

"By thunder, some one is coming," said Jesse, closing the door and bolting it. On came the footsteps pell-mell up the stairway and paused at the door. The shrill voice of a female cried:

"Haven't ye got that little job done yet? Say, Juniper Nashens, did ye hev to use yer pistols. I heerd some shots fired?"

"Thump, thump, thump," came the fist of the red-headed woman who had presided at the supper table.

"Open the door," she shrieked. "Don't ye hear me. Open the door, I say. Kelly, Kelly, my dear boy, open the door fur yer mother."

Jesse, who was standing by the door, turned the bolt back and the door flew open. Seizing the hag by the arm, he jerked her into the room, and hurling her upon the dead bodies, cried:

"There is your lovely Kelly; now stay with him."

As the James Boys flew down the stairway they could plainly hear the shrieks of the virago, half grief and half rage.

"Now, Jesse, we have had quite enough of that place for once," said Frank, when they had reached the yard. "Let's get away as fast as we can."

At this moment the huge bull-dog, a perfect monster in size and ferocity, sprang forward and leaped at Jesse's throat. His fore-paws were on the bandit's shoulders, and his immense weight almost bore him to the earth.

His loud, deep yelps rang on the air, and his deadly fangs were almost at Jesse's throat. Seizing the monster by the throat with his left hand, the highwayman drew a small pistol with his right. Placing it at the animal's side, just over the heart, he pulled the trigger.

"Crack!" went the pistol, and the dog dropped back to the earth a quivering mass.

"Come for the horses, quick!" cries Frank. The brothers ran to the stable, and placing the saddles on the backs of their animals, lead them out into the road.

"Now, Jess, for Heaven's sake let's go!" said Frank, disgusted with the place.

"Just one moment, Frank, hold my horse," said Jesse.

"Why?"

"I am not through with that infernal den yet."

"Oh, let it alone."

"I will in five minutes."

Frank had already mounted, and Jesse handing him the rein went back to the house. He was gone but a few minutes when he returned with an air of satisfaction.

The cries, groans, and curses of the hag in the room

where she found the bodies of her husband and son could plainly be heard.

"It is all right now," said Jesse. "We will go," and he sprang into his saddle.

"What did you do?" asked Frank.

"Look."

Frank did so, and saw a bright column of flame shooting up from one corner of the old building.

Jesse had set it on fire. Frank now understood why he had gone back to the house.

"That forever settles this hellish den," said Jesse, as the James Boys galloped away.

They traveled the remainder of the night, and at dawn stopped at the residence of a well-to-do farmer for breakfast.

"Where did you stay last night?" inquired the farmer.

"We traveled all night," Jesse replied. "We came to a great forest in which there was but one house, but it being of rather a suspicious character, we concluded to give it a wide berth."

"Aha!" said the farmer, winking knowingly. "It was well you did. It was the house of old June Nashens and he is suspected of being the worst kind of a cut-throat."

"We are very glad then that we traveled all night in preference to stopping with him," said Jesse.

After breakfast, and having their horses fed, the James Boys once more sprang into their saddles. Just as they were in the act of riding off a messenger came up with the news that old "June" Nashens' house had been burned during the night, and the entire family perished in the flames.

It was with no little degree of satisfaction that Jesse James heard the report which would acquit himself and Frank from suspicion.

They traveled the remainder of the day, and passed the night at a farmer's house. The next night they stayed in a small village, and the next being the fifth of September, they entered the village of Northfield, riding down the very lane where Laura was made so happy, and passing the cottage of Mrs. Leigh. They were not a little surprised to see Cale Younger's horse at the stile, and to see him walking arm in arm with a very pretty girl on the lawn.

"Cale has struck it rich," said Jesse to himself. "Aye, yes; now the dog sees us. I wonder if the boys are all here?"

Jesse and Frank rode into the village where they met Clell Miller, Jim and Bob Younger and Charley Pitts. Bill Chadwell was so well known that it was thought best for him to keep shady.

The boys were all talking business and politics, playing strangers even to each other. All were men with immense capital, which was seeking investment.

The James Brothers met them, and they talked horse trade and almost everything else.

"They are doing well," said Jesse to himself. "We will surely make it a success."

There was one pair of hazel eyes which with suspicion watched every movement of the bank robbers. It was Ronald Corder.

On the next evening Jesse and Frank mounted their horses, and started for the bridge designated at the Missouri meeting as the place for gathering.

Other horsemen did the same. Mr. Bell, Eva's strange bean who had returned a few days before, went also, and behind him rode a suspicious, determined man.

"I will see what these scoundrels are about," said Ronald Corder, for it was he.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIGHT IN NORTHFIELD.

It was on the 7th day of September, 1876. A single horseman came galloping into Northfield at a rate of speed that hardly seemed necessary for any ordinary business.

Several merchants and citizens hearing the clatter of hoofs, looked and beheld the well-known form of Ronald Corder.

Dr. Henry Wheeler, a man noted for nerve, coolness, and judgment, was standing in front of a drug-store. Dismounting from his horse, Ronald ran up to him, saying:

"Doctor, I want to speak to you inside the drug-store for a moment, if you please."

Dr. Wheeler saw that something of importance was the matter, and followed the young man into the drug-store.

"The town is to be attacked to-day," said Ronald.

"Attacked?" cried the doctor. "Why, we are in the midst of peace. Who is to attack the town?"

"The James Boys and the Youngers. The noted Missouri train robbers and highwaymen will make an attack upon the town to-day!"

Then Ronald proceeded to relate how he had followed the man known as Oscar Bell to a lonely part of the forest the night before. There the man known as Bell, who was none other than Cale Younger, met seven others, and, creeping close to them, from behind a tree, he had heard their plans. On his return an accident happened to his horse, and he had just reached his farm-house, mounted another, and rode in to give the alarm.

During the time Ronald and Doctor Wheeler were engaged in conversation, three men of the strange party rode into town, and eat dinner at a restaurant on the west side of Cannon River, which flows through the village. They ate leisurely, talked politics among themselves, and one of them offered to bet one hundred dollars that Samuel J. Tilden would be elected that fall.

Having finished their dinner, they moved into the chief business street, which is intersected by a public square, and hitched their horses nearly in front of the bank. For a moment they were observed talking to each other in a light, jesting manner, and then all three entered the bank together.

Simultaneously with this entry, three men came galloping across the bridge from the east, yelling and discharging their revolvers.

"Inside; go in your houses and shut the doors," they yelled.

"Crack, crack, crack, crack!" rang out the pistol shots almost continuously. Frank and Jesse James, who were stationed on the west of the village, now came galloping into the village, yelling and firing pistols like they did in old guerrilla days.

Inside the bank were J. L. Haywood, cashier; A. E. Bunker, cashier's assistant, and Frank Wilcox, clerk.

Bob Younger, who was one of the men who entered the bank, presented a knife at Haywood's throat as he sat at his desk, and ordered him to open the vault.

Bunker and Wilcox were covered by the pistols of the other two robbers, and made to hold up their hands.

"Open the vault or die," cried Bob Younger to Haywood.

"Never," stolidly replied Mr. Haywood.

"By the Eternal, you shall," cried Bob, seizing the man by the shoulder, and commencing to drag him towards the door of the vault. Seizing Bob Younger, he tried to shut him inside the outer doors, in which case the bandit would have been completely caged.

While the attention of the outlaws was directed to Haywood, Bunker sprang through a rear door and started to run.

"Crack!" went a pistol, the bullet cutting the shoulder of the man, who, more seared than hurt, ran yelling into the alley.

In the meantime, Dr. Henry Wheeler and Ronald Corder had been aroused by the firing, and coming to the door of the drug store, took in the whole situation at a glance.

"Go back; go back," yelled Bill Chadwell, Pitts and Miller.

"Crack, crack!" went their pistols, and the bullets whistled uncomfortably near their heads.

"Come, Ronald," cried the doctor, "there are arms at the hotel."

They ran to the hotel, while the bullets from the outlaws rained around them. Taking their places at a window, the doctor with a rifle, and Ronald with a navy revolver, they opened fire.

"Crack, crack, crack!" rang the shots in rapid succession.

At almost the first fire Charley Pitts fell dead, face foremost from his horse, a bullet through his heart. Other citizens were arming themselves, and taking part in the battle, which raged furiously in the streets around the public square. Mr. A. K. Manning secured a rifle, Joe Hyde a double-barreled shot-gun, and George Betts a pair of revolvers.

The roar of firearms was almost incessant. A Swede had taken a position in a coal cellar, and had fired two or three shots, when Jesse James, who was a hundred and fifty yards away, sent a bullet crashing through his brain from his pistol.

A man, who was behind a tree in the public square, fell mortally wounded, just as he was aiming at one of the outlaws. The outlaws dismounted, covering themselves with their horses. The battle now raged with increased fury. The air was filled with sulphurous smoke, and the roar of firearms was incessant.

Finding that the bandits were well covered by their horses, Mr. Manning shot and killed the one upon which Clell Miller was mounted. Ronald Corder had singled out Bill Chadwell, and fired three or four shots at him before he fell.

But Bill, at last hard hit, rolled in the street, not far from where Charley Pitts lay dead.

"Come," cried the dying outlaw, "take these, and avenge Charley and I."

Amid a perfect shower of bullets and buckshot, Frank James ran to him, and took his navy revolvers.

Mr. J. S. Allen tried to reach the bank, but a few well directed shots drove him back. He had a bullet hole in his hat and two in his linen duster.

Clell Miller cried out that he was wounded. The position of the robbers was desperate. Two of their number lay dead, another was wounded so that he managed his horse with difficulty, and Dr. Wheeler, Betts, Corden, Manning and others were pouring in a constant fire from points of advantage.

The alarm spread to the inside, where nothing had been accomplished, and the three who had made a fruitless raid prepared to retreat. Bob Younger, whose knife had already touched Haywood's throat, leaped over the counter crying:

"Curse you, open the vault, or I'll cut your throat from ear to ear." Bob doubtless had no intention of carrying out his threat, yet it failed to intimidate the cashier.

One of the bandits now placed a revolver at Mr. Haywood's head and fired. The man who had been so faithful to his duty fell to the floor and expired without a groan.

The last hope of obtaining the treasures that vault contained was gone. The cashier was dead and the secret of the combination of the lock had died with him.

The three bandits inside ran out into the street where Jesse and Frank James with the wounded Clell Miller were fighting like caged tigers.

Jesse mounted his horse with the rein in his teeth and a revolver in each hand, old guerrilla fashion, charged again and again up the street, clearing it each time. But the houses were being filled with armed men and a continuous rain of bullets rattled around him.

The sharp cracking had increased to a steady roar, and they knew it was only a question of time when they should all be shot down.

"Mount quick," cried Jesse, "we must leave this accursed town or we shall all be killed."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLIGHT.

No sooner was the order given than every highwayman vaulted in the saddle, including even the wounded Clell Miller.

Jim Younger's horse was killed under him, and instantly Cale Younger, who had mounted, returned to his helpless brother. At one bound he had vaulted upon the krupper, and the six now went thundering down the street in a south-western direction.

From behind every house, from every window, every stamp, hedge and ornamental tree came the flash of gun or pistol and whiz of a deadly ball.

Charley Pitts and Bill Chadwell were left lying in the street where they had fallen. There was no time to pay any attention to the dead.

The thunder of flying hoofs warned the villagers that the bandits were in full flight. The firing ceased, and preparations were instantly made for a vigorous pursuit.

"Cale, did you get anything?" asked Jesse, as they flew along the road almost neck and neck on their blooded horses.

"Not a dollar," Cale Younger replied with an oath.

"This has been a most disastrous attempt," said Jesse.

"Yes, and it is not over with yet," Cale answered.

"Crack!" went a rifle in the distance.

"Oh, Heaven, I am shot," cried Jim Younger, who was behind his brother.

"Hold on if you can," said Cale, grimly. "When you can hold no longer, I will carry you before me."

"How bad are you hurt, Jim?" asked Jesse.

"I can not say. The ball is in my groin, I believe."

They galloped on for a mile or more. When they were safely out of reach of immediate shots, then Cale said to his wounded brother:

"Can you stand it to ride, Jim?"

"Yes, I think so, though I am almost crazy with pain," replied Jim.

"We will get a horse for you as soon as we can, and then you will be easier. Never give up. You will be lynched if you are taken."

"Never," cried Jim, grimly. "They shall not take me alive."

"There are some signs of pursuit," said Jesse, galloping up. He had been hanging back in the rear to cover the retreat.

"Then we must move with more speed," said Jim.

"When we get through Dundas I shall think we are safe."

"We must have another horse," said Cale. "My animal is a good one, but he cannot carry double on such a chase as this is likely to be."

They were galloping along the road at a lively rate. The tame turkeys, chickens, ducks, and geese flew from their path. The farmers stopped in their harvest work to wonder why those six men on five horses were traveling so fast.

Women and children, hearing the roar of coming hoofs, ran to the door only to see a fast receding dark mass of mounted men, and a long line of dark, rolling dust.

It was a flight for life. The blood of the men of Northfield was up. The streets had run with blood, and the country would be shocked for miles around. The bandits knew that already the telegraph wires were ticking the events for thousands of miles in every direction.

With teeth firmly set, and breathing an occasional oath, the highwaymen thundered over the road.

The town of Dundas was in sight. They came upon a Swede, who was hauling a load of hoop-poles.

He looked about in some alarm as he heard the thunder of horses' hoofs approaching him.

"Halt!" cried Jesse James, in sharp, clear, ringing tones. The Swede pulled up his team. "Where are you going?"

"Vas goin' do down," said the Swede.

"We want that bay horse."

"Vell, me no zell him."

"But we will take him," cried Jesse, leveling a revolver at the now thoroughly frightened man.

"Ow, ow, ow!" cried the Swede. "You must point dot thing von some udder direeshon. Me ean no stand 'im."

"Dismount, Bob, and cut that horse loose," cried Jesse James.

Bob Younger was not slow to obey, and when this was done Cale mounted the Swede's horse, and Jim rode in Cale's saddle.

They now managed to get along much faster. They passed around Dundas rather than through it, and once more in the main road, upon the other side of the town, went thundering on at as great a rate of speed as their horses were capable.

They proceeded directly on toward Shieldsville, traveling at a thundering rate of speed.

"Our pursuers are not more than a mile behind us," said Frank James.

"They are determined on our blood," said Jesse. "We must prepare now to die with the harness on."

"Curse them," cried Cale Younger, "if they would come within reach of our revolvers we would make it lively for them. Their guns are longer range than our pistols, and we cannot reach them."

Their pursuers were evidently gaining on them, as they were mounted on fresh horses, and had fresh men and horses added to their ranks every mile they traveled.

"We will have to give them a lesson," said Jesse. "Heaven, how I wish I had fifty of Quantrel's old guard, just such men as charged under Anderson at Centralia, I would put that motley mob of nondescript farmers and clerks to flight, and kill the last one on the prairie between here and Dundas."

"But we have only six, Jesse, and two of them are wounded," said Cale Younger. "What are you going to do in a case of this kind?"

"Do the very best we can. See that every pistol is carefully loaded," replied Jesse.

The sun was almost down, and they were on the prairie near Shieldsville.

Their pursuers now came forward, shouting and yelling like fiends.

"Crack, crack, crack!" rang out rifle shots, the balls whizzing just above the heads of the outlaws.

"They have an advantage," cried Jesse.

"What?" asked Cale Younger.

"Their guns are of longer range than our pistols."

"Bang!"

"Whiz!"

"Zip!"

"That was a musket ball, curse them, such guns will hold up a mile," cried Jesse, becoming furious at being taken at such disadvantage.

Drawing his heavy navy revolver, he leveled it and fired three shots, but without effect, at the advancing horsemen.

"Cale Younger, I once saw you kill a Federal captain nearly a mile with a horse pistol; try and see what you can do in this case," said Jesse.

Cale tried three shots, but without effect. He had lost his skill by some means. The whole band seemed doomed.

A shot struck Bob Younger in the elbow, shattering the bone.

"Come closer, curse you! come near enough so we can reach you with our pistols!" yelled Jesse.

But they all seemed content to stand off and pour in the leaden hail.

The bandits fell back slowly into a large ravine near Shieldsville, and there kept the foe at bay until dark, when they silently stole away.

CHAPTER X.

EVA'S SHAME.

ON that afternoon in which the James Boys and their band made the unsuccessful attack on the Northfield bank, Eva Leigh chanced to call at the home of Laura Norton.

"Laura, don't be angry at what I said to you on that evening," she said. "I did not mean to insult you."

This was the first time the girls had met since they parted in the lane.

"Oh, never mind apologizing, Eva," began Laura.

"Don't mistake me, Laura," said the pretty little Eva, imperiously. "I am not apologizing. That would seem to indicate that I had done wrong, which I have not. I have a right to chose my gentlemen companions, and to make a choice of a husband."

"Of course you have, Eva; no one doubts that. Yet when you were seen keeping the company of a man of unknown if not of doubtful repute, it was but doing you right to warn you."

"I want it distinctly understood!" cried Eva, her black eyes flashing with ill-concealed passion, "that whoever breathes a word of harm against Mr. Bell does so against me. His fate is my fate, his shame is mine."

Laura started in amazement. The color forsook her face, and after a moment, she said:

"Eva, it is I who should ask your pardon. I did not dream you were so much to each other; so near one."

Eva, with a cold, sneering tone, replied:

"I did not intend to make our engagement known for awhile, but there are so many who are actually dying with envy because I have captured the tony man for whom they were setting their triggers that I just want them to know it is too late. Those envious girls can now console themselves with the knowledge that I shall soon be the wife of the richest, most dashing and handsome man in all Minnesota. I just thought they might know it, and I knew very well how to get the news conveyed."

Laura was more hurt than ever. That this direct accusation of her being a tale bearer should be made to herself in her own home, astonished her.

Her face reddened, and for the first time in her life she was almost in the act of displaying temper. She controlled herself and was silent.

At this moment the wild clatter of horses' hoofs were heard going up the street. The girls looked out at the window and beheld Ronald Corder galloping by.

"That rude country clown; he might suit a girl with no taste, but he does not suit me," said Eva, her pretty face becoming hideous with scorn and contempt.

Riding up another street were three men, among them was the mysterious Mr. Bell.

"See how graceful, how noble he rides," said Eva. "Ah, he is a dear fellow. He is a man worthy of the love of any woman. He is a man of heart, brains and money."

Laura was awed into silence by the strange words of Eva. The mission of Miss Leigh was pretendingly one of peace, yet her visit was without a doubt to tell of her engagement, and gloat over her own success to her friend.

Laura was so completely disgusted with the spoiled beauty that she was silent. Several minutes passed thus when Mrs. Hunter suddenly burst into the room, her face wild with excitement.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Hunter?" asked Laura, in some alarm.

"The town is goin' to be attacked," she cried.

"Attacked by whom?" asked Laura.

"The James Boys and the Youngers from Missouri. Mr. Ronald Corder found it all out, he is now tellin' Dr. Wheeler in the drug-store I heerd 'em talkin'," she said, almost out of breath.

"Tell us all about it, Mrs. Hunter," said Laura, more alarmed than ever.

"It's all true, every word of it. Mr. Ronald Corder says as how he was watchin' that feller what has been cuttin'

such a spludge and calls his self Bell, an' sparks the gals. He is not Bell at all, but Cale Younger, the horse thief an' robber."

"Who ever says that lies!" cried Eva Leigh, forgetting her maidenly modesty.

Laura turned her large blue eyes upon Eva in astonishment. Mrs. Hunter was equally astonished.

"It is all a base fabrication by Ronald Corder to injure Mr. Bell. Ronald is jealous of him, and he invents this falsehood."

"Eva," cried Laura, sternly, "do not say a word against Ronald Corder in this house!"

The girl opened her large, dark eyes wide in surprise.

"Crack, crack, crack!" rang out three pistol-shots, accompanied by a chorus of yells.

"There, they have begun it!" cried Mrs. Hunter. "Oh, Lord! some un is goin' to be killed."

The thunder of horses' hoofs and a rattling crash of firearms brought all to their feet.

"Oh, what can it mean?" cried Eva.

"They are fightin'. The robbers and Ronald Corder; yer fine Mr. Bell, who is a cut-throat and a robber, is tryin' to rob the bank!" said Mrs. Hunter.

"Mr. Bell is no robber."

"Wait, Eva, and see," said Laura, coolly.

They were not more than two blocks away from the square. There seemed to be a lull in the firing after the first few shots. Everything was in the wildest excitement.

"Bang!" went another shot.

"Bang, bang! crack, crack! pop, pop!" half a dozen more.

The fight was evidently growing warmer up on the square.

The three ladies saw Mr. J. S. Allen, a citizen, running down the street, past the house, and Laura hailed him.

"Mr. Allen, Mr. Allen, for Heaven's sake, what is the matter?" she cried.

"We are attacked," was his answer.

"By whom?"

"The James Boys. That scoundrel Bell is the man who is at the head of it. He, and two more are in the bank now, robbing it; I am going for help to capture them."

Mr. Allen ran on, and Laura turned to Eva. She was pale as a ghost. In a voice which was scarcely more than a hoarse whisper, she said:

"Laura, it is not so! Tell me you do not believe that my darling Oscar is a thief?"

"Alas, poor Eva, I fear it is true," said Laura.

"Oh, no, no, no! I can't believe it, I won't believe it. It is only a plot to humiliate me. The girls would all be more than delighted to have it so."

Laura now discovered that it was her pride, not her love that would be wounded by the humiliation, and felt less sympathy for her.

The fight still continued to rage with unabated fury. From where the girls were they could witness the conflict without being in much danger of stray bullets.

They beheld Ronald Corder, the gallant Dr. Henry Wheeler, A. K. Manning and George Betts in the hotel, firing their guns and pistols with terrible effect upon the outlaws.

Two were down in the street, and one horse was killed.

Three more men came out of the bank and joined the other bandits in the fight. Through the shifting clouds of battle smoke which hovered above the field of carnage, the eager eyes of Eva Leigh pierced. Now her heart leaped wild with fear as she thought or feared she recognized a familiar form.

The bandits are mounted, their tall commanding chieftain, the Bandit King orders the retreat.

Gracefully they wheel to fly, when the horse of one falls dead. The constant cracking of firearms is now a roar.

The man whose horse is slain springs up behind another, and all six bandits on five horses come thundering down the street by the house where the three women were watching the conflict and retreat.

The eager eyes of Eva watch the horse that carries double. The outlaws are opposite her, and her eyes are now fully convinced.

"Oh, Heaven, it is he! it is Oscar Bell!" and with a wild cry Eva Leigh fell to the earth. Tenderly Laura and Mrs. Hunter took up the insensible girl and bore her into the house.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FATE OF THE YOUNGERS.

FROM Shieldsville the route of the fugitive bandits and their pursuers lay westward across the country, near a chain of lakes that diversify the beauty of this section. The alarm had spread. Governor Pillsbury had offered a reward of six thousand dollars for the capture of the outlaws, and the railroads from the southeast and southwest, and from nearly every section of the north, were bringing to this line of counties, desperate bands of well-armed hunters, urged on by the love of adventure and love of gain.

The outlaws rode hard to the westward on Friday, and went into camp where they built a fire and made a meal of corn and potatoes, which they gathered from the fields. They shot a calf, also a pig, but both managed to run off and elude them in the bushes.

Gloomy and silent the outlaws sat around the small camp fire that night. The whole world seemed to have risen against them, and they were surrounded by foes on every side. Far more dangerous was their situation now than when they were guerrillas. Far more dangerous than if they were in old Missouri, where the clarion notes of Mr. V. of the U. S. Senate was ever ready to sound their praise, or speak a good word in their behalf. Where editors were devoting columns in their defense, and where thousands—hundreds at least—were willing to throw open the doors of their houses to shelter them from harm, and turn the reckless pursuer on the wrong road.

Here no pitying eye looked upon them, no friendly voice spoke words of cheer, or turned the ruthless pursuer upon some other track. No gentle hand grasped theirs, as in old Missouri, and led them to the ladies' boudoir, where they could remain in ease and comfort until the chase was over.

"We are in a bad fix," said Jesse, "I wish we were back in old Missouri."

"They are all around us," said Cale Younger, grimly, and if we make our escape it will be a miracle."

"It seems that the accursed trains must all be loaded down with militia. Not one comes that don't bear a company, and some a whole regiment."

"Clay and Jackson counties, in Missouri, are our safest places of operation. It is dangerous for us to operate anywhere else," said Clell Miller, grimly.

"But what are we to do at present. The facts are we must get out of here; which is the best way?" asked Jesse.

"I think," said Cale Younger, "that we had better abandon our horses, and try to make our escape on foot."

"I have thought so, myself," Jesse James replied. "I also think it would be well to separate."

"Such a thing may be necessary in the near future, but, for the present, we had better move together," said Cale Younger.

They commenced a painful march to the southwest on foot, beset with danger on every hand.

Jesse James was trudging along ahead of the small column, which came on in single file. Suddenly a man started up from the prairie grass in front of them.

"Halt!" cried Jesse, and the next instant his revolver covered the poor fellow, who was frightened almost to death. The man hardly knew whether to fly or not. But that deadly weapon in the hand of such an expert marksman as Jesse James was more than the man would risk, so he surrendered.

He proved to be a man named Dunning who had been scouting for them, but, unfortunately for himself, got too near.

A conference was held as to the fate of the prisoner. Clell Miller was in favor of putting him to death, but the others thought it best to tie him in the woods, and leave him. Dunning begged most piteously, and declared that to tie him would be to leave him to a fate worse than death, as he would certainly perish before being found.

From motives of humanity they administered an oath to him that he would reveal nothing of seeing them, and turned him loose. But even voluntary oaths are not regarded of much consequence nowadays, since Bob Ingersoll says there is no hell, and a forced one was never very binding. Dunning lost no time in making his way to where he could tell what had passed, and the pursuit took on a fresh energy from the revelations he had to make.

At midnight on Monday the bandits passed through Mankato. The whistle of the oil mill startled them, as they thought they were discovered, and the signal was being given. Worn out and wretched they struggled on until morning, when they gathered some green corn and water-melons, and succeeded in killing three chickens. Before they could get their breakfast prepared they were alarmed by shouting, and again pressed on.

During the day the whole party crossed the Blue Earth River, and in a brief talk discussed their situation. For five days they had been passing through almost incredible hardships. Not one of them could have drawn off his boots. Bob Younger, with his right elbow shattered, felt even his splendid physique giving way. Jim Younger and Clell Miller were also wounded, but not so badly.

Jesse and Frank James being the freshest of the party, proposed to create a diversion by traveling more to the west and leaving the other four to their own course. By this it was hoped they would draw a part of the pursuit upon themselves, and give Cale Younger a chance to get away with the wounded men.

They separated, never again to meet on this earth, Frank and Jesse James going off to the west, the others moving more in a southerly direction.

The sufferings of Cale Younger's party can be imagined, but it is impossible to describe it.

The morning of the 21st day of September, 1876, dawned bright and clear, but it brought no hope to the outlaws. They had passed the night before in a swamp near Madelia.

When the sun arose, it revealed to the bandits the terrible fact that the sheriff of Sioux City had surrounded them with one hundred and fifty men.

"What shall we do?" asked Clell Miller of Cale Younger, who now acted as leader.

"Do," said Cale with a grim smile. "What can we do but die."

Crack! came the report of a heavy caliber rifle, and a minnie ball whizzed through the small thicket in which they were concealed.

"Shall we fight?" asked Bob of his brother.

"Of course," Cale replied. "You are wounded, Bob, but do the very best you can. You have one good arm and four loaded revolvers."

Cale now caught sight of a man trying to cross a log to firmer ground nearer their thicket.

"Crack!" went his pistol, and the man fell with a splash in the water.

"Crack, crack, crack!" rang out a thundering volley of guns and rifle and musket balls, with showers of buck-shot were poured into their miserable little camp.

Hemmed in from every side, there was no hope of escape. Their foes, with shouts and yells, continued to load and fire from a safe distance, while the outlaws knew only too well that their short range pistols were dropping short.

The little thicket in which the robbers were concealed, was swept with minnie balls. For some time the little puffs of smoke from the center of the thicket told it was still a

fight. First Clell Miller fell dead, his brain pierced by a rifle ball. Bob Younger was almost disabled from the start, and when the besiegers closed in upon the little camp, they found Cale Younger down with seven wounds, Jim Younger with his jaw shattered, Bob with his right arm hanging useless and with two fresh wounds, and Clell Miller with his hands still clutched, and a hard look upon his dead face.

They were now prisoners, but captives among a Christian people. Their wounds were dressed, they were moved as gently as the situation allowed, and at Madelia, where they rested for a time, were treated with great kindness.

The tender-hearted women had laid flowers about the cold face of their dead comrade, whose identification was not yet complete.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

FRANK and Jesse James were more skilled in wood-craft than their companions, and possessed a far greater amount of endurance. They were but a few miles away when they heard the report of fire-arms in the direction of the swamp.

"Let's go back, Frank," said Jesse, "and see if we can render them any aid."

"No," said Frank, seriously and gravely, as he always spoke. "We can do them no good. They are in the swamp near Madelia, and surrounded. If they cannot cut their way through, then we have no hope. We will simply be imperiling our lives and doing them no good."

Jesse was silent and sad. He felt only too well the wisdom and truthfulness of the remarks of Frank. They continued to plod on wearily and hungrily. That night Jesse robbed a hen-roost, and they made a meal.

The untiring pursuit of their enemies followed them over hill and dale, across river and swamp.

Frequently the pursuers had them completely surrounded, but their wonderful cunning and adroitness always brought them through.

In the meanwhile how fared the Youngers who were captured in our last chapter. They were removed, as soon as their wounds would allow, to Northfield, and there many recognized, in the wounded and suffering outlaw, Coleman Younger, the young fellow who had been playing the game under the name of Oscar Bell.

Poor Eva Leigh, her humiliation was complete. She retired to the privacy of her own room, and for weeks was

not seen outside of it. How could she endure the shame, disgrace, and triumph of her enemies?

To add to her remorse and vexations there came to her ears the rumor that Laura Norton and Ronald Corden were betrothed. Oh, how dear Ronald now seemed to her that he was lost forever. She learned when it was too late that she never loved Oscar Bell, *alias* Coleman Younger. Her admiration for an apparently genteel gentleman and the rumor of his reputed wealth had turned her head. She supposed she loved him, but, alas! she did not.

The man she really loved was Ronald Corden, who now was the hero of Northfield, sharing equal honors with the intrepid Doctor Wheeler.

Oh, how she could have loved him! how she, who sought honors and distinction so ravenously, could have been honored as the wife of the man whom she called the awkward country clown.

The false man, for whom she had allowed her love to be proclaimed to the world, filled a felon's cell.

At last Eva determined to face the cold, cruel world, and bear the worst with the best grace she could. When she ventured out she was received with such kindness and tender regard that for a moment she forgot her past sorrow.

None was more kind to her than Ronald himself. He whom she had wronged so greatly seemed freely to forgive her, and she began to hope yet that she might win back the man to her side, when the announcement in the village paper announcing his marriage to Laura blasted her last hope.

Eva is still single, sad, but proud, hiding her scalding tears, and going through the world with a crushed heart.

There was much speculation in regard to the fate of the three Younger brothers. Some supposed they would be lynched; but the citizens of Northfield, who had displayed so much courage, showed that they also respected the laws of the land.

The Youngers were indicted for manslaughter in the third degree and robbery. The penalty would not be death. When arraigned for trial, they pleaded guilty, and the doors of the Minnesota penitentiary swung behind them, shutting them out from that stormy life in which they had fought and bled forever.

Frank and Jesse James were the only outlaws of the eight who had gone on the disastrous expedition to Northfield, Minnesota, who escaped.

They were pursued vigilantly to the very border lines, and far beyond; but no man can yet boast that he has ever captured one of the wonderful James Boys. A price was set upon their heads, and they seemed never to forget it, as their atrocious acts since bear witness.

[THE END.]

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THE James Boys and Timberlake.

By D. W. STEVENS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CLEVER FARMER.

It was growing late one summer day, several years ago. Four persons were riding on horseback along a dark, wooded road, about ten miles west of Kearney, Missouri, just out of the famous Craeker Neek neighborhood.

Of the four, three were men and one a woman, or rather young girl. It would be difficult to tell whether she was a blonde or brunette, for she partook of both. Her eyes were a dark blue, almost black, while her hair was a dark brown.

She was beautiful and modest, with fine features, and evidently of a romantic turn of mind.

The man who rode by her side was a young man, tall and graceful, with broad chest, rather high forehead, and a daring expression.

This man was no other personage than Jesse James, the Bandit King of America. The black horse he bestrode was the famous Siroc, the swiftest horse on earth.

The other two men in the party were Jim Cummins, the daring highwayman, and Frank James, the tall, slender brother of Jesse, a man very quiet in appearance and somewhat deadly in his hatred.

Jesse James was quite devoted to the young lady equestrienne, Miss Zerelda Mimms, and well might he be. She had risked life and character to save him when environed by foes. When the outlaws were surrounded in an old mill by a large posse of determined men under Timberlake, the sheriff, who had sworn he would be at the funeral of Jesse James, she at the head of a few determined citizens came to his rescue.

They were now on their way to some place of safety.

Jesse James and Frank had returned from Mexico to visit some of their old friends and relatives in Missouri.

While at Craeker Neek they found themselves suddenly confronted by Timberlake, and only escaped, as we have stated, by the timely arrival of Miss Mimms and their friends.

"Where are you going to put up to-night, Jesse?" asked Jim Cummins.

"At Crandal's."

"Can he be trusted?"

"Yes; he will not refuse us shelter, and is one of the best friends the James Boys have," said Jesse.

"Everything is so changed," said Jim Cummins, with a sigh. "You cannot trust any one."

"I hope you are not getting blue, Jim," said Jesse, with a laugh.

"No."

"Then why that sigh?"

"Everything, I said, was changed."

"Well, what if it is?"

"Our friends are becoming changed."

"As long as they are changed for the better we need have no care on our minds about it."

"But I am afraid they are not."

"Do you think our friends are not as steadfast and true as of old?"

"No, I don't."

"Why, my dear sir, would you ask any one to be truer to their trusts and more devoted to our interests than our friends who came so gallantly to our rescue?"

Jim Cummins scratched his head with the butt of his riding-whip a moment, and then said:

"Yes, they came nobly and grandly to our rescue, but were led on by the brave lady-knight, Miss Mimms."

Miss Mimms blushed, and bowed her head at the compliment.

"Well, never fear, Jim, you will find Crandal, our farmer friend, all right. He will prove true to us."

"I don't know," said Jim, shaking his head dubiously.

"He seems to be all right I know, but then those large rewards, curse 'em, they might turn the best o' us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jesse. "You need have no fears of the rewards affecting Crandal."

The sun had now dipped behind the western horizon, leaving green pastures, hills, forests, and beautiful farm cottages in the somber twilight. The stars had not yet appeared in the sky, but their silent twinkling might momentarily be expected.

"There is the house," said Jesse, turning Siroc's head in the direction of a large two-story frame building.

Miss Zerelda, his rescuer and affianced, kept at his side. She had no other companion than the highwayman, as he was conducting her to her home.

The front gate was reached.

"Hilloa!" called Jesse.

"Bow, wow, wow, wow!" began three or four dogs.

"Helloa!"

"Bow wow, wow wow!" came the answer from the dogs, with increased fervency.

The door opened and an old gentleman came out. He was a farmer with a head somewhat gray, and slightly bald.

He wore long iron-gray whiskers, and was dressed in his shirt-sleeves, with a straw hat in his hand.

His eyes twinkled somewhat curiously as he tried to discover who his visitors were.

"Do you not know us, Mr. Crandall?" Jesse asked, as he reached the yard gate.

"Oh, yes, I do now, I do now, by hokey, I do now," said the farmer, with a broad grin on his rather inexpressive features.

"Do you think you can entertain us to-night?" asked Jesse.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," and the farmer stared and gaped with astonishment at the young lady, until she averted her head.

"Do you mean to say, Jess, that you are married?" the farmer added in an undertone, his eyes assuming more and more of a curious look.

"No, no," and Jesse shook his head and laughed. "This is a young lady who has befriended us, and we are conducting her home. The best room your farm-house can afford for her for the night. We can rough it almost anywhere."

"You shall all be treated like kings and princes, Jesse," said the farmer. "Dismount, and I will go in and tell the old woman to fix supper. We just killed a 'mutting' to-day, an' are all healed, by hokey."

The farmer turned about, and was going to the house, when Jesse said:

"Hold!"

The farmer executed an about face, and brought up in front of his guest.

"Well, what Jess?"

"Who have you here?"

"No one but our own family."

"No hired help?"

"Yes, there's Snide Jones, my man, but a kind of a half silly fellow."

"Are his suspicions easily aroused?"

"No, but then it is not necessary that you tell him who you are. Ye might call yerselves Mason, Dixon and Line. The young lady might be yer sister. The old woman 'll tumble to it in a minnit, by hokey."

"You are very clever, Crandall."

"Yes, rather," said the farmer, stroking his beard in a complacent manner.

"I am glad to have so clever a friend."

"It's a pretty good thing to have sometimes occasionally," and the farmer winked, repeating his pet exclamation. "by hokey!"

"Our horses——"

"The boys 'll attend to them."

"No, we will attend to them ourselves. We never leave matters so particular as feeding, currying, and grooming horses to others," said Jesse.

"Well, the young leddy will come in right to onct?"

"Yes, sir."

Jesse sprang from his saddle and gallantly aided Miss

Mimms to alight. When she had dismounted, the farmer escorted her to the house, mentally exclaiming:

"Pretty gal, by hokey!"

He returned to where the highwaymen stood with their horses. Then called Snide Jones to assist in bringing hay, corn, and oats for the horses.

CHAPTER II.

SNIDE JONES.

At the call of the farmer, a man, apparently about thirty-five years of age, with black eyes and whiskers, narrow forehead, and a nose like a hawk's beak, came from some place about the farm.

He fixed his small, bright, feverish-looking eyes on the three stalwart forms of the bandits in a rather curious manner.

"Come here, Snide," said the farmer, to the half-witted looking creature. "Help these gentlemen with their horses."

"Well, I reckon I will," said the idiotic creature, as he took Siroc by the bridle.

Siroc was not willing to be led by such a creature as Snide Jones. He made a snap at him, and with a yell the idiot bounded away.

"Oh, Jemima!" roared Snide. "Is that a 'oss or a alligator?"

The outlaws laughed heartily at the terror evinced by the farm hand.

"By hokey, Snide, can't ye manage that hoss?" asked the farmer, turning about and fixing his eyes on the cowering wretch.

"No, no; goody Lordy, I'd rather try to lead a wild cat-termount and two crockodiles."

"Never mind leading him," said Jesse James, with a smile. "I will lead Siroc; he will allow no one else to touch him."

"Siroc, Siroc, Siroc," said the half-witted fellow, shying to one side. "Why don't you call him flying devil?"

"Hush up, Snide; go and get some corn," commanded the farmer.

"I will."

The farm hand ran bounding away, much as a boy might.

"Crandall!" said Jesse, in a low tone.

"Well."

"Where did you get that fellow?"

"He came here some three or four months ago."

"From where?"

"I do not know."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"He is a half idiot, but a very good farm hand. That's about all I know about him."

"Are you sure he is so much of an idiot after all?"

"Why, of course, can't you see he has not got good sense?"

"He don't seem to, but yet he might be acting a part."

"Snide Jones act a part, not he," laughed the farmer. "He has been but one thing ever since he came here, and that is half fool."

Jesse then led Siroc away to the stable.

The ugly farm hand was seen climbing up the side of a

crib to a door; he turned a hand spring into it, and began filling a large basket.

His small head, with slightly curly hair, and long neck, were visible to the highwaymen as they led their horses to the stable.

Stalls were found for each. Jesse, Frank, and Jim superintended the removing of the saddles, and feeding, currying, and rubbing off their horses.

They had completed the attentions required for their animals and had replaced the saddles on their backs.

"Now," said Jesse to his companions, as he stood in Siroe's stall, "we must remember that we are in the enemy's country."

"You have seen nothin' suspicious, have you, Jess?" asked Cummins.

"No," said Jesse, "that is nothin' particu-lar."

"You are sure you can trust Crandall?"

"Yes, as much as anybody. But watch him, watch everybody."

"I'm in favor of that," said Jim Cummins. "What do you think o' this farm hand?"

"Snide Jones?"

"Yes."

"I don't know."

"He seems to be a fool."

"And yet he may not be such a fool as he seems."

"He can know nothing about us."

"No; and must know nothing about us."

"Well, had we better watch him?"

"To be sure, watch everybody."

"I will," said Jim.

Frank James nodded approval. Frank never spoke unless compelled to. He was a man of very few words, but what he said always had some weight about it.

He usually allowed Jesse, who was the younger of the two, to do the planning and talking.

"He is the most singular fool, if he is a fool, and the shrewdest man, if he is shrewd, that I ever saw," said Jesse James to his brother and Jim Cummins.

"Well, is everything ready?" asked Jim.

"Yes; loosen your saddle-girths, but leave the saddles on. Have your pistols in good order, and be prepared for trouble. The James Boys and their men are never safe."

"The more the reason we should always be on the look-out."

"Yes; let's go now, everything is safe."

The men gave one more look at their horses and saddles, felt of the girths, to see they were just right, and left the stable.

No sooner were they out at the door than there was a slight commotion among the hay in one of the mangers at an empty stall.

A head was stuck out. It was a human head, and covered with short black curly hair. The eyes were small and glittered, not a little like a serpent's.

The long neck craned out, and the grin on the face was hideous.

It was an ugly face. Dark, sunburned, with hooked nose, lips thin, and teeth small, white and gleaming.

The face was the face of Snide Jones. There was not

near so much of the idiot in the look and grin he gave the departing highwaymen as there was of shrewdness.

"He, he, he, he!" he tittered, as he stretched his long neck further and peeped out from the stable door. "'Tis they, sure pop. Oh, Jemima, but I knowed it would come to this some time, he, he, he!"

The look he gave was one of shrewdness.

He wormed his way from the hay mow much as a snake might crawl from a bunch of straw, and then crept carefully and stealthily towards the door.

Everything that Snide did was done silently.

The diabolical grin was still on his face.

Siroe saw him, and aimed a spiteful blow at the man with his hind foot, as if he knew that his master had an enemy in Snide Jones.

"So, so, my fine fellow," said Jones, taking care to keep out of the way of the horse's hoofs. "Don't be so mettlesome. We will come to know each other better yet."

The horse gave an angry snort and let fly his hind foot once more at the pretended fool.

Ah, no you don't; you can't reach me with yer hoofs, and I'll be dad blasted if I am goin' to get in range of you."

The man had now reached the door, and working his head out, was gazing with his small lynx-like eyes after the three highwaymen.

"I was fully convinced before that it was those fellows, and if there had been any doubt of it whatever, their own admissions settle the matter."

He grinned most hideously as he gazed out into the gathering darkness.

"Now or never is my time. I have spent months here waitin' for a chance like this, and it's come at last," said the pretended idiot. "But it won't do to hurry this matter. Wish I knew exactly where Timberlake was, I'd have 'im here sure. But wait until they all get to sleep, just wait—just wait."

He dodged back into the stable, crawled out the back way, turned a few hand springs, and went to where the farm boys had a trapeze spring.

When next seen by Jesse James he was turning over a horizontal bar.

CHAPTER III.

TIMBERLAKE'S CHARGE.

ABOUT a dozen miles from the farm-house of Mr. Crandall there stood another large elegant farm-house, built on the good old-fashioned plan, with broad piazza, and surrounded by stately elms.

On the evening that Jesse James, his brother, Jim Cummins and Miss Minns put up at Crandall's house a party of seven men rode up to the house of Mr. Gill.

Mr. Gill was one of the best citizens in the country. He was noted as an honorable, upright gentleman, one who would not swerve from duty, and who was an avowed enemy to the outlaws then infesting the great State of Missouri.

As soon as the men were drawn up in front of the house a dog barked, and the farmer came out.

He was not a little astonished to see seven well-mounted, well-armed men, but boldly advanced toward the gate to meet them.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said.

"Good evening, Mr. Gill," said one who seemed to be leader of the horsemen.

"Oh, I declare, this is Mr. Timberlake, the sheriff."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Mr. Timberlake, what can I do for you?"

"We want lodging and accommodations for ourselves and our horses," said Mr. Timberlake.

"We can afford but poor accommodations, let me assure you, but we will do the best we can," said the farmer.

"We are used to roughing it, Mr. Gill."

"I suppose so. Out on business, I should judge?"

"Have been."

"After some one?"

"Yes."

"The James Boys?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I wish you could get 'em, and wipe that dark stain from the character of our State."

"It will never be done while the citizens of Missouri turn out *en masse* to defend them."

"They don't do that, do they?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"No longer than last night."

"Ah! shocking—shocking. How, and where?" asked the farmer, somewhat eagerly.

"Why, last night I had Jesse James and Frank James, with their gang, hemmed in at an old mill in the Cracker Neck neighborhood. We could have taken them very easily, but when we had them almost subdued, down comes two boat-loads of Senators, Congressmen, and newspaper editors, with masks on their faces and guns in their hands. We were compelled to fly for our lives. All Cracker Neck seemed up and in arms, with a Joan of Arc in the bow of the boat, cheering the worthy officials on to victory."

"Can such be possible!" said the farmer, somewhat disgusted.

"It is. I would not have believed it had I not witnessed it with my own eyes," said the sheriff.

"Come in, and let me have your horses eared for," said Mr. Gill. "You must be tired."

"We are," said Timberlake. "We have been after Jesse and Frank, and shall continue to follow them until both are captured."

"Good for you, sheriff, I like to hear you talk so. Never allow outlaws to so completely take possession of a country."

The men sprang from their horses, and being almost worn out, lay down upon the green lawn in front of the house.

The farmer brought a chair for Timberlake, and he sat down upon it.

"Supper will be ready for you men soon," said the farmer. "Rest yourselves here, and the boys and I will look after your horses."

The James Boys would allow no one to attend to their horses save themselves, but Timberlake and his men were not so particular in the matter.

While success depended upon the speed and endurance of their animals, their lives were not at stake upon their speed.

The horses, however, were well watered, carefully fed and curried.

"Supper is ready," said the farmer.

A day in the saddle gives the man a relish for his supper, and the tired officers did ample justice to the meal set before them.

"Do you intend to be out early in the morning?" said the farmer.

"Yes, sir, we must be off by daylight, if we can. The James Boys cannot be far ahead of us."

"Are these all the men you have?"

"No," said Timberlake. "We had forty in the fight last night; but when the James Boys broke away from us we divided our forces up. Our men are scouring the country in every direction, and we will find them somewhere."

"I sincerely hope so."

At an early hour Timberlake and his men were reposing on blankets and quilts stretched on the great piazza.

All were soon buried in slumber. Hour after hour glided slowly by. There was no sign, no noise to awake them, and the wearied men slept on.

Inside the farm-house the farmer and his family were buried in sleep.

Midnight came, and the moon shone but dimly through the clouds in the sky.

A tall, rather bent form, with short, black hair and long neck, might have been seen slowly working its way along the fence as if it wished to escape observation.

So stealthily and so noiselessly did the figure move that it was not observed by any one save the moon, and she withdrew her face behind a cloud as if to aid him in his secrecy.

The household slept, the sheriff and his men slept, and even the careful watch-dog slept.

No one was awake, and so silent and stealthy were the movements of the new-comer that he was not liable to awaken any one.

He moved slowly, carefully, and noiselessly. The dog slept, and he passed within a few feet of him. Timberlake slept on the edge of the piazza, and by his side the figure paused.

It grinned a hideous, idiotic grin.

"Every one says I am a fool; now we'll see if I don't know what I am about."

He craned his long neck forward and downward, looking the sheriff full in the face. Then, with his forefinger, touched him in the side.

In a moment Timberlake sprang to a sitting position, a pistol in his hand.

"Whist!" said the new-comer.

"What is it?" whispered Timberlake.

"Do you want Frank and Jesse James?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Snide Jones, secret service detective."

"Do you know where they are?"

"I do."

Timberlake rubbed his eyes and looked about him. He gazed for a moment in the horrid, grinning face before him, and said:

"Yes, I know you now."

"Thought ye would. Ye've seen me afore," said Snide Jones.

"Can ye take us at once to the place where they are?"

"Yes; wake 'em up, and come on."

Timberlake carefully aroused his sleeping men.

Tired as they were, he had only to whisper in their ears the names of the James Boys, and they were on their feet in a moment.

"Get ready!" said Timberlake.

Pistol-belts were tightened, boots and hats drawn on, and they were ready.

"Now follow, without making any noise."

Snide Jones, with the horrid grin on his face, was in the lead. The stable was reached, horses saddled and led out.

Still the farm watch-dog was not awakened from his slumber.

"Where is your horse?" asked Timberlake of Jones.

With a grin he pointed to a horse hitched under a tree. It belonged to the farmer, Mr. Crandall, and had been borrowed, without asking, by Snide Jones.

All were mounted, and went at a tearing gallop in the direction of Mr. Crandall's house.

In about two hours later the house is in sight.

"Are they there yet?" asked Timberlake.

"Yes," Jones answered.

"Then charge!"

Deep into the flanks of the horses the rowels were plunged, and Timberlake and his men were thundering on around the house where the highwaymen slept.

CHAPTER IV.

AT BAY.

"JESS!"

Frank James almost yelled his brother's name.

Jesse James sprang from the bed upon his feet.

"What is it?" he asked.

"We are surrounded."

The thunder of horses' hoofs could be plainly heard.

"Who is it?"

"Timberlake."

At this moment Jim Cummins sprang into the room where Jesse and Frank had been sleeping.

"Betrayed!" he hissed.

"We don't know yet," said Jesse. "Dress as soon as you can. Look well to your pistols."

Jim disappeared.

"Frank?"

"Well."

"You are dressed, are you not?"

"Yes."

"See how many there are of them."

Frank James had just buckled on his last pistol, and now crept to a small window in the house.

Pushing the curtain aside he peeped out.

"What am I to do about Zelda?" said Jesse to himself.

He had been in many closer places than this, had been surrounded by more foes than could be below, but at this time he was encumbered with a young lady.

He could leave her with the farmer, Mr. Crandall, but he knew Zelda too well to think she would for a moment submit to it.

Pausing at the door he rapped.

"Who is there?" asked a sweet musical voice.

"It is I, Zelda; are you awake?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Dress quickly."

"I am already dressed."

"Did you hear the sound of horses' hoofs?"

"I did."

"Do you understand what it means?"

"Timberlake is on us."

"Zelda, we will be compelled to fly from this house; will you go with us or remain here?"

"I will go. I am ready."

The door opened, and Jesse James started back with an exclamation of surprise.

Well he might. Before him stood, not a young lady, as he supposed, but a handsome boy. The shapely limbs and white hands, with feminine face, beautiful and girlish, might betray him, however.

Jesse's hand had dropped down to his hip pocket, resting on the handle of his revolver.

But a moment he remained thus, then his astonishment giving way, with a smile he said:

"Why, Zelda, who would have thought you would have done so?"

"Hush, think of me only as a recruit," she said. "I found these clothes in the room. They doubtless belonged to some boy; but I will wear them now for a while."

"Do you mean to say you are going to turn highwayman, and share our dangers with us?"

"I will."

"You have no firearms."

"Yes, I have," and she held up a pair of small silver-mounted revolvers.

"Jess."

It was the voice of Jim Cummins on the stairway.

"What?" Jesse whispered.

"They are all around the house."

"Then something must be done."

"Yes, and at once."

"Wake up Mr. Crandall."

"He is already awake."

"Have him see what they want and talk with them."

Jim hastened down to the room in which the farmer slept, and conveyed Jesse's message.

"Follow me, Zerelda," said Jesse James, taking the girl's hand in his own.

Mr. Crandall opened a window, and, looking out upon the crowd gathered about the house, said:

"Hello! who are you?"

"Timberlake," was the answer.

"Well, what do you want?"

"We want every man in that house to come down and out of it. You must raise your hands up as you come out and have no arms."

"What does all this mean?"

"It means that men are in there whom we want prisoners, and intend to take."

"Who are they?"

"Jesse and Frank James, and another man of their gang."

"Those persons are not in my house," said Mr. Crandall.
 "I know nothing of them. Go off and don't bother me."
 "You have some people in there besides your family."
 "Yes, sir; but I have no reason to suppose every traveler is a highwayman."
 "Will you surrender?"
 "No," said Mr. Crandall, resolutely. "I have done nothing for which I should surrender."
 "We will fire on your house if you don't."
 "I will return the fire if you do," said Mr. Crandall.
 "It is my own house, and I will defend it."
 "Send out all the women and children then, if you will not surrender."

"I will not send out my wife and children to be butchered by you," said Mr. Crandall. "I don't know you. You may be cut-throats and highway robbers, for all I know."

Mr. Crandall had seized his double-barreled gun, and ordered his wife and children into the cellar.

Jesse James approached a window to gaze out. He discovered that Timberlake had a dozen men with him.

His force had been increased on the way to the farmhouse.

"Advance!" said Timberlake.

"Crack!" went Jesse's pistol, and a bullet grazed the the sheriff's cheek.

"Fire!" roared Timberlake.

A volley of rifle and pistol shots shook the earth, and leaden hail rattled against the house.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE BARN.

"ZERELDA, for Heaven's sake, go down to the cellar," said Jesse James, as he saw the fair girl still standing at his side.

"No, no!" she answered, firmly, "I will share your danger with you."

At this moment Jim Cummins came up.

"Jim," said Jesse.

"Yes, captain," said Jim.

"Can you make out their number?"

"They are somewhere between a dozen and fifteen."

"So many?"

"Yes."

"Who brought this about?"

"I don't know, captain," said Jim.

Glancing through the window, Jesse cried:

"They are coming; we will be compelled to repulse them."

"Fire!" roared the deep thunder tones of Timberlake.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!" rang out a volley of pistol shots.

"Come!" shouted Jesse, "some one must die."

Thrusting out a self-cocking revolver, he pulled the trigger repeatedly.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

On Jesse's side the night was ablaze with shots.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Frank James was at the north end with a pair of revolvers which worked like Gatling guns.

"Crash!" a heavy blow fell against the front door.

Some one had struck it with an ax.

"Run to the front door, Jim," said Jesse James.

Jim Cummins, with a revolver in each hand, ran down the stair-way to the front door.

"Crack!" went a revolver, the bullet passing through a panel of the door.

"Oh! oh, o—oh, oh!" groaned a voice from without.

"Some one got it," said Jim.

"Crash!" came another blow, causing the house to shake to its very center.

"Crack!" went Jim's pistol.

The bullet crashed through the door, and passed through the arm of the man who held the ax.

"Oh, thunder!" roared the man who had the ax, dropping it to the ground. "Cuss 'em, I am killed, I am killed!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Jim sent two more shots whistling through the door. The next moment he unbolted the door.

Two dark bleeding forms lay near the door, and another ran howling away, holding his bleeding wrist in his hand.

A crowd of half a dozen were coming up to aid the men who had attacked the door.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!" went three more shots from Jim's pistol, and one of the men fell. The others fled.

Jim drew the ax in the house, and closed and bolted the door.

The attack on the house became general, and the fight promised to be bloody.

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

Went both barrels of Mr. Crandall's shot-gun, and it was evident that some one was hit.

"By hokey!" cried the farmer, wiping his face with his handkerchief, "but they will find this exceedingly hot work before we are through with it."

Jesse James and Frank had not fought in vain, and every chamber in one of the small revolvers of Miss Mimms' was emptied.

"Jim," said Jesse.

"Well?"

"We must get to our horses."

"Yes."

"This blasted old house is liable to take fire at any moment."

"It's going to be a serious undertaking."

"I think not very."

"Why?"

"Most of these men are novices."

"What plan have you?"

"We must make a feint at one side, draw them and their fire there, then break out at the other."

"That will do; but when we get to our horses how much better off will be than here?"

"A great deal," said Jesse.

"How?"

"We will have our horses," said Jesse, "and can make a cavalry charge through them if necessary."

Jim saw the wisdom of Jesse's plan.

Jesse sounded a whistle and Frank came to his side.

Mr. Crandall was seriously wounded and had fallen to the floor.

Jesse communicated to Frank his design, and Frank and Jim Cummins went down to the front door, where they began to fire upon the crowd of officers and posse there.

Those collected in the front yard fell back, with yells of rage and terror.

"Come," said Jesse, taking the hand of Miss Mimms in his own.

"Stop!" cried a man, springing from behind a tree.

"Crack!" went Jesse's revolver.

Down dropped the man at whom he had fired, and Jesse and his fair companion reached the barn.

Frank and Jim Cummins came after them next, running as fast as they could.

All reached the barn in safety, and turned about to meet the foe who came rushing and yelling upon them.

CHAPTER VI.

JIM CUMMINS' PLAN.

"BACK, there, back, back!" cried Jesse James.

"Surrender, as you value your lives!" cried Timberlake.

"Never!"

"Then die!"

"Crack!"

"Oh!" cried Zerelda, throwing her face to her hands.

"Devil, you have killed her!" cried Jesse James.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!" went every shot in the pistol he held in his hand.

Two or three went down under Jesse's fire and one killed. Jesse wound his arm around the waist of the girl dressed in boy's clothes.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asked. "Oh, Heavens, I fear you are mortally wounded."

Miss Mimms made no response for a moment, then pressing her hand to her forehead said:

"It is only a scratch. The bullet stunned me, that was all."

"Thanks. I feel thankful for that. Keep well back out of danger, we will do the fighting."

"Put her in that empty stall," suggested Frank.

"A good suggestion, Frank," said Jesse, and he conducted the beautiful girl to the stall. "Remain here, Zerelda, and do not leave until I call for you," said Jesse. He stooped a moment and pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

She threw her arms around his neck and sobbed.

"Oh, Jesse, Jesse, I cannot bear to have you leave me, even for a moment. Where peril is thick, there should I be at your side."

"No, no, I cannot think of it. You must not, shall not

expose your life. You would only endanger me by doing so."

"Why, Jesse, might I not be near, and in the hour of danger, when some cruel bullet is about to pierce your head, even my feeble hand may stay it, or strike down a would-be slayer."

"You must remain here for the present. I have been in dangerous places before. A good soldier always obeys the command of an officer, unreasonable as it may seem to him."

"I will obey."

"Will you remain here?"

"Yes," she murmured, with a sob.

"Thank you," said Jesse, and once more he imprinted a kiss upon her ruby lips. "If such a wretch as I may be permitted to call upon Heaven to bless, I pray that Heaven may pour the choicest blessings upon your head."

He was gone, and at the great barn door where his brother and Jim Cummins were in the act of barring it.

"What are they doing?"

"Nothing, that we can see."

"Are they consulting?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"Have they entered the house?"

"Yes, are all over it."

"How many can you make out their number to be?"

"They seem to have been recently reinforced," said Frank James, who had taken a position at a crack near the door.

Jesse took up a position near the great door, where he obtained a good view through a knot hole.

The smoke from the many pistol shots that had been fired hung thick upon the air.

Through the broken rifts of smoke, and rolling pillars of the same, they could catch occasional glimpses of the flitting forms.

There was a small open lot around the stable, which was surrounded by a rail fence.

On the other side of the fence was the lawn about the house. This was covered with trees and vines.

Behind the fence and among these trees, screened by whatever would protect them, were their would-be captors. They had overrun the house and dragged the wounded farmer out upon the porch.

His wife and children had come up from the cellar, and were uttering screams and shrieks as they bent over the wounded man.

"I believe they have killed him," said Jim Cummins.

"Who?"

"The farmer, Crandall."

"Who is that fellow there?"

"Where?"

"At the right of the group."

The eyes of the three bandits were turned upon the man who had been alluded to.

Suddenly Jesse said:

"It is that fellow, Snide Jones."

"So it is."

"By Jove, he has given us away!" said Frank.

"He is a detective," said Jim Cummins.

"Oh, he is too much of a fool," said Jesse, yet with just the least bit of uneasiness in his tone and manner.

"But he is," said Frank. "Listen—he is talking to Mrs. Crandall."

They all listened. The detective, with the hideous grin on his dark face, and his long neck craned toward the agonized woman, was saying:

"You thought me a fool, but I was not. I started out to find and arrest the James Boys, and I am determined to do it, come what may. You shall yet see that Snide Jones, whom you despised, is no fool."

"Crack!"

Jesse James could stand no longer the arrogance of the man who was doubtless as great a villain as the man he was endeavoring to arrest; so the bandit king fired a shot directly at the detective's head.

The distance and darkness, however, caused him to miss his mark, something Jesse seldom did.

"He must be killed," said Jesse. "If we every one hang for it, all others escape, Snide Jones must be killed."

Jones, who was a coward, kept himself well out of the way. Again and again was he shot at and missed.

At last Jim Cummins devised a plan whereby he thought he might not only kill the cowardly detective, but some of the others.

In their retreat they had brought the double-barreled shot-gun of Mr. Crandall. This they loaded to the muzzle with shot, bullets and cartridges, having first put in powder enough to burst a cannon.

Jim Cummins then took the gun and crept from the rear of the barn. Keeping well in the shadow of the fence, and covered by the revolvers of his two companions, Jim Cummins crossed the fence into another lot which was covered with trees and shrubs. Knowing they would be along soon, he placed the gun in a horse-trough that stood in the lot and tied it fast. Fastening a string to each trigger, he cocked both barrels, and crept back, holding to and unwinding the string as he went.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS MIMMS' GALLANTRY.

TIMBERLAKE and his force made but a short pause after their first repulse. They knew the barn to be a large and a strong structure.

In it Jesse James and his force, which might have been increased since Snide Jones left, could keep off a large force.

They hoped, when they found Mr. Crandall wounded, that he would give them some information in regard to reaching the outlaws.

But he, though shot through the stomach and dying, was obstinate, and refused to give them any information whatever.

"You have murdered me," he hissed, his eyes gleaming with deadly hate.

"You have murdered yourself," said Timberlake. "We would not have harmed you if you had only come out and surrendered. But you insisted on harboring outlaws and robbers.

"You are murderers. You are robbers and murderers yourselves," cried the dying man. "I will tell you nothing."

"Come," said Timberlake, "we have no time to waste here."

Several shots had been fired at them from the barn, and they knew the highwaymen were there yet.

Jim Cummins had placed the gun on the east side of the barn. The house being a little west of south, he supposed they would cross the wooded lot in order to reach them.

In this, however, he was very much mistaken.

Timberlake, with half a score of men, among whom was the cowardly detective, Snide Jones, went around to the west side of the barn.

They crossed a small orchard and passed up through the weeds and bushes in such a manner they could not be observed by the highwaymen.

Miss Mimms had been left, as the reader will remember, in an empty stall of the stable.

She was no sooner alone than she placed one foot upon the feed box, and, clinging to the cross-piece of the manger, climbed up into the hay mow above.

"I will not leave my post," she said, "by going up higher."

Jesse had left a large revolver to defend herself with, and she was an excellent shot.

The reader must not think that Zerelda was blood-thirsty and cruel.

She was gentle and kind. She would not harm a fly or insect, but she loved Jesse James—loved him with a love that bordered on to frenzy. She would die, would have done any horrible deed to have aided Jesse James to escape from his foes.

Once in the hay-mow, she pushed the hay aside until she came to the wall.

The wall was on the west side of the barn.

Feeling her way along it and pushing the hay back, she at last came to an opening.

"This may serve some good purpose," she said, as she looked out through the opening.

The moon was yet several hours high, and would not descend until the sun arose in the heavens.

The sky was not very cloudy, and yet occasionally a fleecy cloud would cover the face of the moon.

Her eyes were sharp and pierced into the darkness about the place.

From her elevated position she could see for some distance around the barn. There was no one in sight as yet, but as she watched from her position, she saw creeping forms moving forward towards the barn.

"It is the enemy, the enemy," she whispered to herself, and her heart palpitated with the uncontrollable excitement.

What should she do? Her judgment and reason told her she ought to inform her friends below of the dangerous foe which was advancing upon them.

As nimble as some sailor boy, she descended from the hay-mow and whispered at the end of the stall:

"Jesse, Jesse!"

"What, my dear?" the outlaw asked, springing to her side.

"They are coming in from the west."

"Who?"

"Your enemy."

"How could you see them?" asked Jesse, glancing at the solid wall at the end of the stall.

"I disobeyed you by climbing up into the hay-mow above," she answered.

Jesse had no time to scold her for disobedience, for at this very moment he heard the sound of footsteps alarmingly near on the outside of the barn.

"Frank," he said.

"Yes," Frank answered, springing to his side.

"Come with me and Jim."

"Yes, sir."

"Remain where you are."

"All right."

"Keep your eyes wide open, and a pistol in each hand." The outlaw declared he would.

Stooping, Jesse pressed another kiss on the cheek of the beautiful girl in male attire and said:

"Do not expose yourself to danger, Zelda."

"I cannot remain idle while your life is in danger," was the response.

"Come quick," said Frank. Both the brothers now leaped up into the hay-mow.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Rang out their pistol shots. The attacking party fell back; but they had accomplished their design, which was nothing more than to roll a barrel of dry straw against the barn and set it on fire. The blaze could be seen through the cracks, and the dry barn would soon be enveloped in flames.

Something must be done. A heavy attack was made on the west and south, so that the three highwaymen were kept busy.

But Miss Mimms was equal to the emergency. Going to the north end of the barn, she climbed down from an upper window by a rope and then crept around on the west side. Timberlake's men saw a boy crawling on hands and knees, and fired shot after shot at him, but missed, owing to the fact that the supposed boy kept so close to the ground.

Miss Mimms reached the burning barrel and pressed her way between it and the barn. The pistols of her lover roared like small cannon above her and drove back the enemy. Placing her back against the wall of the barn and her feet against the barrel of burning straw, she kicked the latter with such force that it rolled three or four rods away, and the barn was in no danger from it.

Then, to spring to her feet and return by way of the rope was but the work of a second.

CHAPTER VIII.

TIMBERLAKE FRUSTRATED.

"How is this?" said Timberlake to Snide Jones, the detective, as soon as he found his plan to burn out the bandits had failed. "You said there were but three of the highwaymen."

"There wasn't but three," said Snide, craning his long neck from behind a tree, and a grin on his ugly features.

"But now there are four."

"How?"

"Three men and a boy."

"Oh, te, he, he, he!" chuckled Snide, "I can see through all that very easily."

"Well, then, explain it to me, will you?"

"That boy is only a girl in boy's clothes."

"Thunder."

"Yes, it's so."

"Why didn't you tell me so before? I have fired a dozen shots at her, supposing she was a boy belonging to the band."

"Ye see I didn't think about it until you mentioned the fact to me," said Snide Jones. "For because you see there were three men, Frank and Jesse James, and Jim Cummins; they came up to the house, and a girl with 'em. She's as pretty as a picture, and I think is either Jesse's wife or to be soon. Well she'd die for him, so she puts on boy's clothes to help 'em out."

"That is quite romantic," said Timberlake, with a frown.

"Sheriff, our burning out plan is a failure," said one of his men, coming up to the officer.

"Yes."

"What will you do next?"

"Storm their castle."

"Can we do it?"

"We must try."

"We shall lose some brave men."

"I know it."

"Can you not try some other stratagem?"

"No."

"Why not wait until morning, when we shall have reinforcements to aid us?"

"Cannot."

"Why?"

"Because the moon will be down an hour before daylight. They will take advantage of the darkness to fight their way through."

The man reflected a moment and said:

"I expect your judgment is right."

"I know it is," answered Timberlake. "Pass the word all around the line for the men to remain firm at their posts, and not move until I order them to do so. The highwaymen may make a feint at one side, and then break out at the other."

"Yes, sir, I will pass all around the line with the command."

"Tell them to keep cool."

"I will."

"Jones come here," said Timberlake, when the man was gone.

Snide Jones craned his long neck out from behind his tree, while his small black eyes glittered with a fiendish, half-frightened light.

"Will it be safe?" he asked.

"As safe for you as for me," said Timberlake, who began to despise the man for his cowardice.

Carefully and stealthily the detective moved across the open space, dodging at every step, as if bomb-shells were whistling above his head.

"Now, fellow, you are safe enough," said Timberlake, seizing him by the shoulders, and shaking him severely.

"Yes, yes, I know."

"You see our burning plan has failed?"

"Yes."
 "We must adopt some other."
 "Yes."
 "Have you any to suggest?"
 "N—no."
 "Well, I have."
 "What i—is it?"
 "Carry their fortress by storm."
 "Y—you'll all be killed!"
 "No we won't; besides, we can't get at them any other way."

"I—is that so?"
 "It is. Now, which is the best side to attack from?"
 "W—what?" asked Snide, his teeth chattering with fear.

"Where had we better make the attack from?"
 Jones reflected a moment, and then said:
 "I think from the south-east you can get the nearest."
 "How is the ground there?"
 "Almost level."
 "Well, as to trees?"

"Covered with trees and shrubs to within forty paces of the barn, where there is a fence.

"Then that is the place," said Timberlake.

Calling a dozen of his men about him, he said:

"Now prepare to make a dash on that barn. Whatever we do must be done quickly. We cannot fool any longer about this, but we must root out those fellows now."

The men were silent, but by the aid of the moonlight he could see that the faces of some had grown a little pale.

Men whose faces grow pale will sometimes fight.

Timberlake knew this, and did not regard it as a very unfavorable omen.

"Remember now, we can have no faltering from any one," he said. "The danger is equal all around. The robbers are there. There are but three men and a girl in boy's clothes. We can take them, and must."

Turning to Snide Jones, he added:

"You must lead us."

"Me?" and the odd, monkey-like mouth was opened wide with astonishment.

"Yes, you," said Timberlake. "But if you are such a coward, show us the way, and then lay behind some tree."

The moon was sinking low in the western horizon, and partially obscured by clouds. Timberlake cast an uneasy look about him, and again urged on his men the necessity of immediate action.

"Come on," he said, and Snide Jones led them around the barn by the house and across the lawn once more. In the bushes and under the trees where the fierce fight had raged lay three of their men pale and ghastly in death.

When the small wood-covered lot in which Jim Cummins had placed the shot-gun was reached Snide Jones refused to go any further.

"Well, come on then," said Timberlake to his men. "We will open fire from behind this fence, and can make it effective too."

"I'll get behind this trough," said Snide, squatting at the end of the cattle trough, with the dark muzzles of the shot-gun in three inches of his head and face. But he did not observe them.

Timberlake sounded a whistle for some more men to come to his aid.

"Crack, crack, crack!" rang out three pistol shots from the barn, and one of his men was wounded.

Others were advancing, when a terrific explosion in the rear of the sheriff's advance shook the air. The trough was shattered to pieces, the head of Snide Jones was blown to atoms, and several of the sheriff's men were more or less injured.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE CREEK BANK.

TIMBERLAKE was so completely frustrated by the strange explosion that he fell back with his main force.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Jesse, Frank, and Jim Cummins kept up a constant fire on the sheriff's posse, driving them further and further back.

"Jess," said Jim Cummins, "it won't do to wait here until daylight."

"No."

"When are you going to make the break?"

"As soon as the moon is lower and it is darker."

"How will you do it?"

"I can't say; that is owing to circumstances."

"You don't propose to leave the horses?"

"No, sir."

"Then we will go out on horseback."

"That will depend on circumstances."

Jesse had been carefully scrutinizing the barn and premises.

Below, on the northwest, was a wooded pasture, sloping down until it came to a creek.

Here was a place where the banks were dug away, making the place fordable.

The creek bank was very steep in other places.

Jesse called Frank to his side. Still and silent as Frank James was, his judgment in cases of great emergency was not to be despised.

"Frank, we are in a close place," said Jesse.

"Yes," was the only answer.

"But we have been in many closer places before."

"We have."

"I think, however, we had better get out of here before daylight."

"There is some danger in making our way from here."

"There is."

"And yet we must do it at all hazards."

"We must."

"Now, Frank, I have examined the place and premises carefully, and have come to the conclusion that the most suitable place for us to make our exit is through the woods northwest to the creek."

Frank was silent. Jesse knew full well by his brother's silence that his mind was not fully made up on this point yet. Then he asked:

"Do you know any better plan, Frank?"

"No."

"Now, my plan for making our exit is this. You and Jim Cummins will keep the enemy in front engaged by a constant fire. Zerelda and I will tear off some of the boards at the rear of the barn and lead the horses through. We will get them down under the creek bank and wait for you."

Frank again was silent, as if contemplating the plan.

"What do you say to it, Frank?"

"It is very good."

"Come here quick!" cried Jim Cummins.

The sharp report of a pistol rang out on the air.

"Crash, crash, crash!" came three or four heavy blows against the door of the barn.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Oh, o-oh!" groaned some one without.

"Curse you!" roared Jim Cummins. "Back, back; stand away from there, or, by all that's wonderful, I'll murder the whole kit and crew of you."

"Down with the door," thundered Timberlake.

Jesse and Frank were at once at the barn door.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Pistol bullets rained out upon the attacking party from the right of the door.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Shots were coming from the left.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Bullets were raining down upon the sheriff's posse from the window above.

Jesse cast his eyes up in that direction, and saw Miss Zerelda standing upon a cross timber which brought her face on a level with a small opening.

Through this opening she had discharged her pistol, emptying every chamber.

"Down with the accursed door!" roared Timberlake, calm and unmoved amid the hail and rain of death that fell about him.

"Back—back!" cried Jesse James. "Don't come any nearer, Timberlake, or this will be your last night of earth."

"I know you, Jesse James!" thundered the sheriff, his giant form towering above the others. "I swore to be at your funeral, and I will!"

"Crack!" went Jesse's pistol.

The ball grazed the sheriff's face.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

Another hot volley from within. Four of the sheriff's men had fallen.

His men shrank back before so deadly a fire."

"Now is our time," said Jesse, and whispering to Miss Mimms, who had descended from her lofty position.

Jesse sprang to the northwest corner of the stable.

By the use of an ax he knocked down two broad boards,

leaving an opening large enough to admit the passage of the horses.

In the meanwhile Jim Cummins and Frank James had kept up a terrible firing on the sheriff's posse in front of the barn.

Miss Mimms had unfastened the horses and led them from the stall.

The side-saddle had been removed from the horse on which Zerelda rode, and a boy's light saddle substituted.

"Bring them through quick!" said Jesse, springing to the outside and guarding the premises, a cocked pistol in each hand.

The brave girl led the four horses through the opening, and she, guarded by Jesse, hastened beneath the creek bank.

Jim Cummins and Frank James, having driven back Timberlake and his posse, hastened after them.

CHAPTER X.

BEHIND THE HAY-STACK.

TIMBERLAKE was not a man liable to become disheartened at failure. Affairs had been rather discouraging beyond a doubt.

He had fought valiantly and lost some of his bravest men, and was no nearer toward capturing the James Boys than he had been at first.

"Curse them, for cowards," he cried, "why don't they come out and fight like men?"

After they had fallen back a few paces the firing stopped.

"The moon will be down soon," said Timberlake, and they will take advantage of the darkness to make their escape."

"Let us advance on the barn by crawling," said one of Timberlake's men.

"They will see us," said another.

"No, they won't."

"Yes, they will."

"I say they won't, what do you say about it, sheriff?"

"I say that I think there would be less danger of being hit, but they would be almost sure to see us."

"The eyes of Frank and Jesse James are keen."

"And their aim sure."

"They are only men," said Timberlake, "and a bullet will kill one of them as soon as it would any other person."

"They seem to be uncommonly hard to hit."

"Come on," said Timberlake, "we must burst through that barn door some way."

Timberlake had been reinforced by some of the men he had sent off on a different route on the day before.

On their way back through the lot the sheriff discovered a heavy log.

He ordered several of the men to seize and batter the door down with it.

Forward they advanced, carefully stooping to get as near the earth as possible.

Keeping in the advance, Timberlake urged them on as rapidly as possible.

He expected each moment that fire and death would belch forth from the muzzle of some deadly pistol.

But as he drew nearer and nearer all was silent as the grave. It was doubtless the calm that precedes the storm.

At any second they might expect flashes of death and streams of fire.

It required nerve to advance under those circumstances, and yet when Timberlake and his men had drawn up in front of the barn, which a few moments ago was a fire-belching volcano of death, they found it as still and as silent as the grave.

Raising the heavy log they hurled the great door from its hinges.

Timberlake sprang over the broken door to find the place deserted.

"Gone!" he shouted.

"Gone?" echoed a dozen voices. "Gone where?"

"No one knows."

A dozen men had sprang in after the sheriff.

"This tells the tale," shouted one, pointing to the open place caused by the breaking away of the boards.

"After them," thundered Timberlake. "They can't be far. Some of you go back for the horses and the others; they are down under the creek bank."

Out into the darkness the intrepid Timberlake leaped.

"Crack!"

"Whiz," went a shot through the air.

He did not know or care from whence it came.

"Forward!" shouted the sheriff.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Curse them; return that fire."

There was crashing and plunging through the bushes and dry tree-tops.

Timberlake and his men were close after Frank James and Jim Cummins, who had left the barn last.

"Ugh, crash!" Jim Cummins came heavily over a log into a brush pile.

"I have one on 'em!" cried a pursuer, leaping astride the fallen highwayman.

"Crack!" went Jim's pistol.

Without cry or groan the man rolled off Jim Cummins, a bullet through his brain.

His companions, who heard his exultant shout, heard the report, and saw the flash, but though they called their companion's name, he answered not.

He would never answer again to the call of human voice.

"On them! head them off!" roared Timberlake, who had collided with a stump.

Jim Cummins was on his feet in a moment and at the side of Frank James, who had wheeled, revolver in hand, to cover his retreat.

For a few moments they made the night air one constant blaze of light by the rapid discharge of fire-arms.

The fire was returned with spirit.

The bullets whistled through the air, cut off the buds and smaller branches from the tree tops, and sent the bark in showers from the trees.

Only for a short time did Frank and Jim Cummins keep up their steady fire on their pursuers.

"Come on!" shouted Jim, leaping a log.

"Jess, Jess, where are you?" they asked as they ran along the bank of the creek.

"Here, here," came the answer.

Both he and Zerelda were mounted, the latter making a very fine looking boy equestrian.

"Are our horses there?"

"Yes," was the answer, "jump down. The bank is not very high, and there is sand beneath; you can make it."

Down, down the two men went, with the determined Timberlake and his posse hard at their heels.

Both were almost immediately in the saddle.

Wheeling their horses into the ford they rode across amid a shower of bullets.

The moon, just setting, showed to their gaze a small body of horsemen riding down a lane coming toward them.

They had ascended the hill on the other side, and Timberlake was in possession of the ford.

"This way," cried Jesse, leaping Siroc over a high fence. Zerelda, mounted on her superb charger, followed. Jim and Frank were not a moment behind, and the four dashed across a meadow, concealing themselves behind a hay-stack.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW SCATTERING SHOTS.

THE moon had just dipped behind the western horizon

"Why not ride on to the other side of the field, and cross over?" asked Jim Cummins.

"Because we do not know how many of Timberlakes accursed gang may be there," was the answer.

"Will they be likely to go away if there?"

"Yes."

"How do you put that up?"

"The shots fired on this side will bring them pell-mell to the spot."

Jesse was right.

Almost as soon as the highwaymen had ensconced themselves behind the hay-stack they heard the clatter of hoofs around the sides of the field.

"There," said Frank.

"I told you so," said Jesse.

"You are right," said Jim.

Zerelda sat upon her horse gracefully and looked like a girlish boy.

Jesse, with tenderness expressed in every thought and word, said:

"Can you, my dear, endure a long, hard gallop?"

"Yes, Jesse; anything that insures your safety."

"Wait a moment, Jess," said Frank James, who silently rode out upon the meadow and, standing in the darkness, tried to pierce the gloom.

Jim Cummins was about to speak when, by a single wave of the hand, he silenced him.

"Halt!" cried a distant voice.

"Look out," said another, "here they come on us—fire!"

It was evident that the pursuers had mistaken a portion of their own party for the James Boys.

"Who goes there?"

"Crack!"

The sharp report of a pistol rang out upon the air, and Frank James could plainly see the flash of the revolver in the distance.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Frank!" said Jesse.

"Well!"

"What does that firing mean?"

"It means that they are shooting at each other," answered Frank James, in a low tone.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

"Pop!"

The shots still continued to ring out upon the air and darkness.

"We had better go, then," said Jim Cummins.

"Yes," answered Jesse.

"When?"

"Now. Come on."

Clapping spurs to their horses, the highwaymen thundered on across the field.

Jesse and Zerebda rode side by side, she sitting as erect as a cavalier, and not the least excited by the many adventures of the night.

"Do you feel wearied?" asked Jesse.

"No, not very," was the answer, in a sweet, musical voice.

"How far can you go to-day?"

"As far as my horse will take me," was the answer, and had it been light enough, Jesse might have perceived a cheerful smile on her face.

"I am glad to find you so cheerful, my dear," he whispered. "This has been a terrible night, and the wonder is how you can stand it."

At this moment loud shouts were heard back at the corner of the field where the lane ended.

"Hold there, hold; what in the thunder do you mean?" a voice was heard shouting.

"Who are you?"

"Timberlake, what in the name o' the demon are you shooting at my men for?"

"Beg pardon; we thought you were the James Boys."

"Well, we are not."

"Have we hit any of you?"

"Yes, two or three are down."

Where are those fiends?"

"The James Boys?"

"Yes."

"I do not know. We run them from a farm here across the creek."

"You were fighting them, then?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"Ever since midnight."

"They must be somewhere near."

"They are; just keep still a few moments and you will hear them running somewhere."

"Easy," said Jesse James, as he slowed Siroe down to a gentle canter. "The morning is very still, and the sound of your hoofs might be carried a mile."

It was not more than a quarter of a mile to where the pursuers had congregated. It was another quarter to the fence on the opposite side of the meadow.

The morning was dawning very rapidly. The eastern

sky had begun to grow bright, and Jesse knew that he and his little band would be discovered unless they hastened across the meadow.

They moved their horses on at a gentle gallop, their horses' feet making but little noise in the soft, tender grass.

"They cannot hear us," Jesse, "unless a horse should stumble."

"Our horses don't often stumble," said Jim Cummins.

"Keep quiet," put in Frank James. "There may be a coward in this gang of pursuers. If there is, he will be here somewhere in these bushes."

The fence was reached. It would soon be light enough to see across the meadow. If they succeeded in getting across they would be safe.

"Jim, dismount and let down the fence," said Jesse.

Jim Cummins was off his horse in a moment.

"Make no noise."

The fence was a rail fence, commonly called in the West a worm fence.

The top rails or riders were removed, and Jim commenced on the others. The fence had been badly "racked," and half a dozen panels came thundering to the ground.

A wild shout out on the meadow told the highwaymen their foes were on their trail.

"Mount quick; that let's it out," said Jesse.

In a second Jim was in the saddle. A few scattering shots rang out on the morning air, and the bullets whistled about the heads of the fugitives.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

"CURSE them; follow them up to the end of the earth," roared Timberlake, who was now in a perfect fury.

It was terrible to see his foe, whom he deemed so secure, escaping him at last.

He spurred his horse until the animal became furious and unmanageable.

Forward he thundered over the wreck of the fence, blind and furious, and fell sprawling among the rails.

The sheriff was thrown from the saddle, and his head struck with such violence against a rail that he was rendered senseless.

One of the men nearest him sprang from his horse and dragged the senseless and bleeding Timberlake away beneath trees.

"Is he killed?" asked one.

"No, no, but badly stunned. Hurry on, if you expect to capture Jesse James."

The pursuers, to the number of half a score, thundered on into the woods.

It was now daylight, though the sun had not arisen in the east. Darkness still lingered in small patches about the forest.

Jesse and his friends soon discovered that the pursuit had lost something of its vigor.

But ten men were after them, and these seemed to advance with considerable reluctance.

"It's my opinion," he said to Jim and Frank, "that we can, by a few well-directed shots, put a stop to this pursuit."

Anything which promised killing and bloodshed suited Jim Cummins.

Miss Mimms went on a short distance with the horses, while Jesse and his two companions halted in a thicket, with cocked pistols.

On came the unsuspecting pursuers.

When within thirty paces, Jesse said:

"Fire!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

The air was filled with smoke and yells of pain and terror.

Horses snorted and plunged riderless away.

Some dark forms were on the ground, but how many the highwaymen did not stop to see.

The thunder of hoofs told them the remainder were in full flight.

With their features grim and silent the bandits hastened to their horses and vaulted in the saddle.

They rode all day in the woods.

Jesse and Miss Mimms, who assumed attire suitable for her sex, went one way, and Frank and Jim Cummins the other.

Jesse accompanied Zerelda in sight of her father's house, and then paused.

"I can go no further, my darling," he said. "I am an outlaw and dare not be seen of men."

"Oh, Jesse!"

"I love you, and to know you love me so dearly is happiness enough for a bandit chief like me. Now, good-bye, my dear."

They had both dismounted. Jesse caught her for one brief moment in his arms and rained his kisses on her cheek.

"We will meet again, my dear. We were born for each other, and, outlaw though I am, they cannot keep us apart. But, farewell, until we meet again."

Jesse mounted Siroe and rode away, while Miss Mimms hastened to her home, wondering how she could account for her long absence, and keep back her wonderful adventures with The James Boys and Timberlake.

There was no signs of pursuit.

That night, or a part of it, was passed at the house of a friend of Jesse James.

The next day the outlaws separated.

[THE END.]

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